

ELISE LOUVIOT

Direct Speech in
Beowulf

and Other
Old English
Narrative Poems

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DIRECT SPEECH IN *BEOWULF*
AND OTHER OLD ENGLISH NARRATIVE POEMS

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DIRECT SPEECH IN *BEOWULF*
AND OTHER OLD ENGLISH NARRATIVE
POEMS

Elise Louvriot

D. S. BREWER

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Introduction

Wenn man sich das bild der erzählenden stabreimdichtung der Germanen vergegenwärtigt, so tritt sogleich die rede der handelnden und leidenden personen als hellbeleuchteter gegenstand hervor.¹

Direct speech is one of the most striking features of Old English narrative poems. Quantitatively speaking, it is hard to miss as it often represents more than one-third of a complete poem and sometimes more than half.² Mostly, though, what strikes the modern reader is the imposing, even cumbersome, weight of speeches in Old English poetry. Several features obviously contribute to that impression: speeches can be very long and formal, they are systematically preceded by a conventional inquit usually taking up at least one whole line of poetry and they are often devoid of an answer, and sometimes even of an addressee.

Early twentieth-century critics, whose views of Direct Speech were informed by classical rhetoric and the modern novel, often found those characteristics puzzling, if not downright disappointing. They criticised Old English poetic speeches for being unable to serve characterisation and the progression of action. One would be hard-pressed to find similarly negative assessments of Old English poetics in contemporary scholarship. Nowadays, critics are much more sensitive to the specificities of early medieval compositions and no one would fault an Old English poem for not matching classical or modern aesthetic criteria – at least not consciously.

Surprisingly, though, that change of attitude has not led to a reassessment of Direct Speech in Old English poetry. To this day, the most complete treatments of the issue remain Heusler's 1902 paper and

¹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 189: 'If one considers the image of Germanic alliterative narrative poetry, then the speeches of the acting and suffering characters immediately appear as a well-lit object.' The lack of capitals on nouns is a feature of the initial publication. Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

² For the poems studied here, proportions are as follows: *Genesis A*, 30% (689 lines out of 2,319); *Guthlac A*, 38% (308 out of 818); *Beowulf*, 39% (1,231.5 out of 3,182); *Elene*, 41% (540.5 out of 1,321); *Christ and Satan*, 44% (317.5 out of 729); *Genesis B*, 50% (310 out of 617); *Andreas*, 53% (910.5 out of 1,722) and *Juliana*, 61% (448 out of 731). Some poems show lower proportions, however: *Exodus*, 13% (77 lines out of 590) and *Judith*, 13% (44.5 out of 349). As the term verse is often ambiguous, referring either to the half-line or to the entire line, I will avoid it as much as possible and use 'line' and 'half-line' instead, as appropriate.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

Richman's 1977 dissertation.³ Even more surprising, some of the old preconceptions regarding the nature and function of Direct Speech – namely that it is intrinsically connected to characterisation and the expression of individualised points of view – still seem to be lurking behind recent scholarship. In particular, the assumption that Direct Speech must serve characterisation through the representation of distinct voices remains intact.

What has changed is that nowadays, when scholars venture an opinion on the handling of Direct Speech – which only rarely occurs – they are more likely to praise the poets for achieving successful characterisation than to blame them for failing to do so. It seems as if, from recognising that Old English poetic speeches differed from our expectations and blaming them for it, we have turned to ignoring these differences so that we can better praise them.

Recent scholarship on Direct Speech has opened up another path, however. Seminal studies by the likes of Tannen and Rosier have shown that Direct Speech is not intrinsically connected to any particular way of representing speeches.⁴ It is merely a form, which different cultures may exploit in very different ways – it may be used to represent distinct voices but it does not have to do so in order to be successful.

It is my contention that Direct Speech is not used to convey different voices and points of view in Old English poetry and that the sooner we recognise this the better able we will be to understand such crucial issues as characterisation, subjectivity and irony. Before we can move on to such important issues, however, it is important to re-examine traditional views on Direct Speech so that we can better deconstruct them and leave them behind.

Traditional Views on Direct Speech

The traditional view on Direct Speech in Old English poetry was largely defined in the early twentieth century by scholars such as Hart, Klaeber and Bartlett, who all describe excessively formal and undramatic speeches:

³ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung' and Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature'. Heusler's is arguably the most complete as it encompasses the whole corpus of early Germanic poetry (and even some Sanskrit texts). It is characteristic of late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century nationalistic Indo-European scholarship in that it is sometimes keener on attempting to piece together what Germanic poetry must have been like before the advent of writing than on examining early Germanic poems as we have them, but it remains an important piece of scholarship. Richman examines the circumstances in which Direct Speech is preferred to other forms of Represented Speech (or conversely rejected in favour of them) and the form taken by the inquit in both Old English prose and poetry.

⁴ See in particular Tannen, *Talking Voices*; Rosier, *Le discours rapporté*.

Introduction

Not the passion for clever repartee, certainly, but surely that for eloquence, appears in the *Beowulf*. The long speeches are there for their own sake: they do not characterize, do not carry on the action. They are formal, dignified, ceremonial in character.⁵

The major part of these [speeches] contain digressions, episodes, descriptions, and reflections, and thus tend to delay the progress of the narrative. But even those which may be said to advance the action, are lacking in dramatic quality; they are characterized by eloquence and ceremonial dignity.⁶

Whatever the proportion of dialogue to non-dialogue, whatever the nature of the speech, the outstanding characteristic of dialogue in Anglo-Saxon poetry is a certain formality. Monologue and duologue, direct and indirect discourse, all are undramatic. The speech is a rhetorical device, beloved for itself quite as much as for any furthering of the action which it may contribute.⁷

It is worth noticing that the first two authors comment specifically on *Beowulf*, whereas Bartlett extends the validity of their judgement to Anglo-Saxon poetry as a whole.⁸ This is representative of a wider trend: most of the research undertaken on Direct Speech in Old English poetry concerns *Beowulf* exclusively,⁹ and those works necessarily constitute an important reference for the rest.¹⁰ The statements quoted here also exemplify another important trend in the existing scholarship: the tendency to judge Old English speeches according to an implicit norm of what Direct Speech should be. It seems that, for Hart, Klaeber and Bartlett, Direct Speech probably should not be formal at all times and that it definitely should help to characterise and promote the action.

Heusler and Richman have provided us with much more in-depth assessments of Old English Direct Speech, but they do not seem to disagree with such statements. Admittedly, Heusler is mostly concerned with technical matters, but he does express the view that Direct Speech occurs when more 'vivacity' (*Lebhaftigkeit*) is needed and that the best

⁵ Hart, *Ballad and Epic*, p. 198.

⁶ Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, p. lv.

⁷ Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 105–6.

⁸ Bartlett refers to both Hart and Klaeber, but also in particular to Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 235–6.

⁹ No fewer than four Ph.D theses have been written on Direct Speech in *Beowulf* (Levine, 'Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*'; McNally, '*Beowulf* *mapelode*'; Perelman, 'The Conditions, Consequences, and Structure of Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*'; and Lee, 'Character from Archetype'), as well as many articles, including the following: Baker, 'Beowulf the Orator'; Harris, 'Beowulf's Last Words'; Shippey, 'Principles of Conversation in Beowulfian Speech'; Bjork, 'Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*'; Hill, 'Translating Social Speech and Gesture in *Beowulf*'; Kightley, 'Reinterpreting Threats to Face'. See also chapter 7 ('Words and Deeds') of Orchard's *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 233–6.

¹⁰ On the excessive influence of *Beowulf* on Old English scholarship, see especially Frantzen, 'The Diverse Nature of Old English Poetry'.

epic texts of the Proto-Germanic period must have used speeches to carry on the action.¹¹ As for Richman, he ends his illuminating accounts of the use of Direct Speech in Old English literature on a rather surprising admission of failure:

If Old English writers took this much advantage of direct discourse, why did they fail to create dialogue comparable to that written by Old Icelandic and later English writers? ... What is the underlying reason that Old English writers employ such an obtrusive inquit? ... oral presentation and the strict rules of alliterative metre do not explain why Old English poets failed to use an unobtrusive enclosed inquit. Unfortunately, I can offer no better explanation.¹²

Behind all those studies – explicitly in some cases but more often implicitly – lies the influence of Plato and classical rhetoric.¹³ In the third book of his *Republic*, Plato opposes Direct Speech, which imitates the characters' voices (*mimesis*), with Indirect Speech, which is a form of narration (*diegesis*):

Isn't it narrative when he gives all the speeches and also what comes between the speeches? ... But, when he gives a speech as though he were someone else, won't we say that he then likens his own style as much as possible to that of the man he has announced as the speaker? ... Isn't likening himself to someone else, either in voice or in looks, the same as imitating the man he likens himself to? ... Then, in this case, it seems, he and the other poets use imitation in making their narrative ... If the poet nowhere hid himself, his poetic work and narrative as a whole would have taken place without imitation.¹⁴

That definition has dominated reflection on Represented Speech for centuries – even to the present day.¹⁵ It is the basis of Plato's classification of literary genres and was systematically reproduced in later rhetorical treatises, including in Anglo-Saxon England under the pen of Bede (*De arte metrica*) and later Byrhtferth (*Byrhtferth's Manual*).¹⁶

¹¹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 189 and 220.

¹² Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', pp. 263–5.

¹³ Richman is the only one who explicitly refers to Plato and who defines Direct Speech in accordance with Plato's writings: '(1) that direct discourse is imitative, immediate, vivid and objective, (2) that other modes of expression are reportorial, mediate, less vivid and subjective, and (3) that the best writers take advantage of the imitative possibilities of direct discourse' ('The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', p. 7). Other writers do not cite Plato, but they often use the classical term *oratio recta* to designate Direct Speech, which is in itself a clue as to where their conceptions of Direct Speech come from.

¹⁴ Book III, 393b–d. The translation is taken from Bloom's edition, pp. 71–2.

¹⁵ See further below, 'Direct Speech Reinterpreted'.

¹⁶ See Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', pp. 3–4.

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However, there is no evidence suggesting that Plato's theory ever had any impact on Old English poetic practice. Generally speaking, the impact of rhetorical treatises on Old English poetic practice has yet to be demonstrated.¹⁷ Furthermore, Bede's and Byrhtferth's treatises only reproduce Plato's classification of genres, without putting it into a larger literary or theoretical context, so that it is largely emptied of its original meaning and, therefore, less likely to have influenced Anglo-Saxon poets. There is no reason either to suppose that Plato's theory necessarily applies to all literary traditions. It was devised for Greek poetry, with the canons of Greek poetry in mind, and while it may prove relevant to other traditions, there is no reason to suppose a priori that its value is universal.

The Persistence of Traditional Views

It might seem surprising to think that traditional views of Direct Speech could continue to influence Old English scholarship today. In the past decades, considerable work has been undertaken to better understand the specificities of early medieval textuality in general, and Old English poetics in particular, so that it seems unlikely that anyone could still use classical rhetoric as a valid standard to evaluate Old English poetics. Indeed, the phrase *oratio recta* has been expelled from Old English scholarship and indictments of the failures of Old English poetic speeches have all but disappeared. And yet, the beast is not as dead as it seems. A comparison of Klaeber's third edition of *Beowulf* and its fourth edition recently undertaken by Fulk, Bjork and Niles is interesting in this respect. The new editors have slightly modernised the formulation of the passage quoted above (p. 4), but they have retained it in its entirety, which suggests they do not disagree too strongly. Even more interesting is their handling of Klaeber's later comments (the initial text is shown here first, with its modernised version below):

In spite of a certain sameness of treatment the poet *has managed to introduce a respectable degree* of variation in adapting the speeches to their particular occasions. *Great* indeed is the contrast between Bēowulf's straightforward, determined vow of bravery (632–638) and Hrōðgār's moralizing oration, *which would do credit to any preacher* (1700–1784). *Admirable* illustrations of various moods and kinds of utterance are

¹⁷ According to Steen (*Verse and Virtuosity*, p. 139), 'There is insufficient evidence to show that the mastery of such [Latinate] devices was acquired from rhetorical manuals or from schooling, so we cannot just take it for granted that Old English poets were using Latin devices consciously, or that they were familiar with their learned names and roles.' Like Campbell before her ('Adaptation of Classical Rhetoric in Old English Literature'), she concludes that Old English poets were more likely influenced by Christian (Anglo-)Latin poetry than by theoretical works.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

Bēowulf's salutation to Hrōðgār (407–455) and *his brilliant reply to the envious trouble-maker Ūnferð* (530–606). [my italics]¹⁸

In spite of a certain sameness of treatment, the poet *introduces a degree of variation in adapting the speeches to their particular occasions*. There is a *notable contrast between Bēowulf's straightforward, determined vow of bravery* (632–8) and Hrōðgār's moralizing oration (1700–84), *as there is between the hero's mild and conciliatory reply to the shore watch* (260–85) and *his fiery retort to Ūnferð's provocation* (530–606). Illustrations of varying moods and kinds of utterances are Bēowulf's salutation to Hrōðgār (407–55), *the Last Survivor's speech* (2247–66), and *Wiglāf's scathing denunciation of the deserters* (2864–91). [my italics]¹⁹

The changes are slight, but, I believe, significant. All traces of explicit value judgements ('respectable degree', 'admirable illustrations') are gone, which reflects a general trend in literary scholarship towards greater neutrality. At the same time, slightly more psychologism is creeping in: Beowulf's speech is no longer merely 'brilliant' but 'fiery' and the added examples include a 'mild and conciliatory reply' as well as a 'scathing denunciation'. The original text suggested that the *Beowulf* poet had failed to produce fully 'respectable' speeches because they were not individualised enough to serve characterisation, but that there were a few creditable efforts worth noting nonetheless. The new version erases traces of the blame and reinforces the notion that there are many speeches expressing vivid individual emotions in the poem, transforming a grudging concession into actual praise.

I think that the praise is misplaced. Not that the speeches are not good, but their strength does not lie in their capacity to express individual emotions. Klaeber at least recognised that, even if he only saw it as a negative fact, and it seems that, on this point, instead of a step forward, the new edition takes a step back from confronting Old English aesthetics as they are.

The ways in which critics have tried to renew approaches to Direct Speech in the past decades are also telling. Since the 1980s, Old English studies have shown some (admittedly limited) interest in pragmatics. There have been a few academic papers on non-narrative texts,²⁰ but also, and sometimes more problematically, on Direct Speech.²¹ It is important to note that the pragmatic concepts used in those studies

¹⁸ Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, p. lvi.

¹⁹ Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, p. lxxxviii.

²⁰ See in particular Nelson, "'Wordsige and Worsige": Speech Acts in Three Old English Charms'; and Green, 'On Syntactic and Pragmatic Features of Speech Acts in Wulfstan's Homilies' and 'Speech Acts and the Question of Self in Alfred's *Soliloquies*'.

²¹ Most notable are Perelman, 'The Conditions, Consequences, and Structure of Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*'; Shippey, 'Principles of Conversation in Beowulfian Speech'; and Kightley, 'Reinterpreting Threats to Face'. Perelman draws primarily on Searle's theory of Speech Acts (*Speech Acts* and *Expression and Meaning*), while Shippey and Kightley

have originally been devised to analyse actual conversations, not Represented Speech. This is not to say that pragmatics can have no relevance for the study of Direct Speech. On the contrary, it can be very useful in assessing precisely how (and to what extent) verbal interactions in Old English poetry differ from actual conversations.

Still, the choice to have recourse to a theoretical framework primarily concerned with actual conversation rather than to critical tools devised for Represented Speech is telling in itself.²² It can partly be explained by the fact that pragmatics focuses on an issue particularly dear to the hearts of Old English writers – the connection between speech and action.²³ Another underlying reason, however, might be the fact that, in the theoretical framework inherited from Plato, Direct Speech is often misconstrued as a form of Represented Speech inherently closer (or even identical) to actual speeches. That misconception, however, has been proved wrong conclusively by specialists of Represented Speech.

Direct Speech Reinterpreted

The confusion between real speeches and Represented Speech is connected to the larger issue of narrative illusion. It is often tempting to see art as a mere copy of reality, when in fact it can only be a transposition.²⁴ The temptation is even stronger in the case of Direct Speech, for at least two reasons. First, Direct Speech has often been used, in

focus more on Grice's principles of conversation ('Logic and Conversation') and Brown and Levinson's notion of face-threatening acts (*Politeness*).

²² By contrast, French medieval literature has benefited from approaches taking into account modern research on Represented Speech. Two of the most remarkable works are Cerquiglini, *La parole médiévale*; Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*.

²³ The importance of that connection for Anglo-Saxon culture is visible in the omnipresence of the formula *wordum and dædum* and its variants in poetry (*worda ond dæda* (Christ III, 1367, 1582), *wordum and dædum* (Genesis B, 440, Genesis A, 2352), *dædum and wordum* (Genesis A, 2251), *worda and / ond w(e)orca* (Phoenix, 659; Beowulf, 289, Psalm, 104 23:2), etc.) and elsewhere. Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Old English poems are taken from the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. For an in-depth analysis of the formula and its uses in legal, poetic and magical contexts, see Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, pp. 157–66. On the same theme, see also Clemoes, 'Action in Beowulf and Our Perception of It'; Shippey, *Old English Verse*, especially pp. 121–4; and Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 203–37. Among studies dealing more specifically with Direct Speech, see also Baker, 'Beowulf the Orator'; Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, especially pp. 3–27; Greenfield, 'Of Words and Deeds'; Hill, 'Translating Social Speech and Gesture in Beowulf'; Jager, *The Tempter's Voice* and 'Invoking / Revoking God's Word'; Mintz, 'Words Devilish and Divine'; Nelson, 'The Battle of Maldon and Juliana'; and Olsen, *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft*, especially pp. 3–5.

²⁴ This is a paraphrase of Gombrich's famous statement that a painting 'is a transposition, not a copy' in his explanation on why the colours on a painting cannot match the actual colours of the real-life object represented (*Art and Illusion*, p. 48).

particular in nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, to promote the illusion of reality; and second, common preconceptions on Represented Speech, which are still taught in our schools, encourage the confusion between Direct Speech and actual speech.

Direct Speech is commonly described as the (written) reproduction of an initial (oral) speech, ideally achieved with all the precision and accuracy that a high-quality audio recording would allow. In other words, Direct Speech is presented as a sort of mechanical, automatic transcription. In textbooks, the impression is often reinforced by exercises inviting students to transform Direct Speech into Indirect Speech, as if the former was the raw material and the latter the processed product. A good example of that attitude is provided by Leech and Short's influential handbook:

The essential semantic difference between direct and indirect speech is that when one uses direct speech to report what someone has said one quotes the words used verbatim, whereas in indirect report one expresses what was said in one's own words. The formal relationships between these modes of report are most easily shown by seeing how it is possible to convert one into the other.²⁵

The two authors then proceed to explain the conversion from Direct into Indirect Speech as a series of morphosyntactic transformations. As shown by Combettes,²⁶ that belief in the intrinsic fidelity of Direct Speech is strongly connected to the confusion between actual speech and Direct Speech: if Direct Speech is taken to be the mere transposition (without processing) of an initial speech, then it seems logical that the final object should be identical to the initial one. According to that logic, the initial speech is displaced, but it is still essentially the same. This, of course, is a terrible misunderstanding; as Sternberg puts it:

In no form of quotation, therefore, not even in the direct style, may we identify the representation of the original act of speech or thought with that act itself; to do so would be comparable to equating Balzac's rendering of the Vauquer pension with the pension itself.²⁷

And yet, traces of such a way of thinking may be found in literary criticism, where Direct Speech is often associated not only with fidelity, but also with simplicity and lack of elaboration. Direct Speech appears as an object somewhat alien to the written world, and thus, for some, to the literary world. Blanchot's take on dialogue is particularly emblematic:

²⁵ Leech and Short, *Style in Fiction*, p. 318.

²⁶ Combettes, 'Énoncé, énonciation et discours rapporté', pp. 97–8.

²⁷ Sternberg, 'Proteus in Quotation-Land', p. 108.

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Dans les romans, la part dite dialoguée est l'expression de la paresse et de la routine : les personnages parlent pour mettre des blancs dans la page, et par imitation de la vie où il n'y a pas de récit, mais des conversations ; il faut donc de temps en temps dans les livres donner la parole aux gens ; le contact direct est une économie et un repos (pour l'auteur plus encore que le lecteur).²⁸

The words used by Blanchot are remarkable in that they establish a radical difference between dialogue – seen as a sort of imitation of real-life conversations and thus, implicitly, as unliterary – and narrative, which is not thought of as an imitation of real-life actions, but as a completely different process: creative rather than imitative.

Since the 1980s, that kind of conception of Direct Speech has been much criticised by linguists. The notion of fidelity has been rejected especially strongly, and with good reason. It has always been obvious that in the case of fiction the idea of fidelity made little sense, at least not literally. For too long, though, the use of Direct Speech in fiction was seen as a separate case or a sort of exception.²⁹ In fact, studies have shown that fiction is not the exception but the norm. Thus, Tannen writes:

The term 'reported speech' is a misnomer. Examination of the lines of dialogue represented in storytelling or conversation, and consideration of the powers of human memory, indicate that most of those lines were probably not actually spoken. What is commonly referred to as reported speech or direct quotation in conversation is constructed dialogue, just as surely as is the dialogue created by fiction writers and playwrights.³⁰

The reason why speakers 'construct' dialogue instead of reporting it is twofold. First, it is impossible to report something accurately under normal circumstances, so that some reconstruction is unavoidable:

It cannot be the case that dialogue presented in oral storytelling is being reported exactly as it was spoken, unless the report is based on the deliberate memorization of a transcript which was based on a tape-recording of the talk. Experiments have proven what is intuitively obvious – that

²⁸ Blanchot, 'La douleur du dialogue', pp. 208–9. 'In novels, the sections written in dialogue are the manifestation of laziness and habit: characters speak to insert blanks on the page, and to imitate life in which there are no narratives but conversations. So, from time to time, it is necessary to let people speak; the direct contact is both time-saving and restful (for the author even more than for the reader).'

²⁹ Occasionally, it is even completely ignored, as in Tuomarla, *La citation mode d'emploi*.

³⁰ Tannen, 'Introducing Constructed Dialogue in Greek and American Conversational and Literary Narrative', p. 311. See also, by the same author, *Talking Voices*, especially pp. 17–19 and 102–32, as well as Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*, pp. 198–9, and Calaresu, *Testuali parole*, pp. 49–52.

humans cannot keep in their minds the precise words they have heard, even for a moment. They listen for the meaning and, when called upon to remember what was said, may reconstruct it into words³¹

Second, and most importantly, accurate report is usually not the objective pursued. In fact, in many instances, it is clear for everyone involved in the conversation that the speech represented never took place. Speakers regularly use Direct Speech to represent 'impossible speeches': hypothetical speeches, choral speeches, speeches too long or too detailed to be remembered or speeches translated from a foreign language, to name but a few of the most common cases. Usually, speakers do not use Direct Speech to provide information on an initial speech to an interested third party, but rather to give more weight to an argument or to dramatise the climax of a story.³² Even when an initial speech does exist, speakers (re)construct it to achieve maximum impact, not accuracy. For all these reasons, it is preferable to use the term 'Represented Speech' rather than the misleading 'Reported Speech'.

The variety and the creativity of the uses of Represented Speech in ordinary conversation, and more particularly of Direct Speech, suggest that the true exceptions are not fictional speeches but textual quotations, which, outside scholarly texts, are actually quite rare. A broader cultural perspective confirms the view that quotation and Direct Speech need not be equated. Rosier shows that in classical rhetoric *oratio recta* (Direct Speech) and *sententia* (quotation) were two very distinct tropes: *oratio recta* was used in narratives to 'imitate' (*mimesis* / *imitatio*) the characters' speeches whereas *sententia* was used as an argument from authority in legal contexts.³³ According to Rosier, the conflation of the two concepts dates back (in France at least) to the seventeenth century, when the issue of Represented Speech was more and more analysed as a grammatical device rather than as a trope. During the same period, the formal similarity between the two devices was reinforced by the progressively systematic use of quotation marks in both cases, so much so that they became identical in the eyes of the theorists, and the characteristics of the quotation came to be associated with the concept of Direct Speech as a whole.

That evolution is also undoubtedly connected with the growth of literacy in Western culture. In oral narratives, of course, there is no punctuation and thus no quotation marks. More fundamentally, the notion of exact textual reproduction does not make sense in oral cul-

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

³² For more details on the various possible functions of Direct Speech, see Calaresu, *Testuali parole*, pp. 55–8 and Holt, 'Reported Speech'.

³³ Rosier, *Le discours rapporté*, pp. 11–25.

tures.³⁴ As shown by Lord, what oral poets consider faithful and accurate is anything but a verbatim reproduction:

We must remember that the oral poet has no idea of a fixed model text to serve as his guide. He has models enough, but they are not fixed and he has no idea of memorizing them in a fixed form. Every time he hears a song sung, it is different ... We are more aware of change than the singer is, because we have a concept of the fixity of a performance or of its recording on wire or tape or plastic or in writing. We think of change in content and in wording; for, to us, at some moment both wording and content have been established. To the singer the song, which cannot be changed ... is the essence of the story itself. His idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include the wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the unessential parts of the story.³⁵

The conception of Direct Speech as a quotation and thus as a textual reproduction is, then, clearly a culturally circumscribed phenomenon and not a universal, obvious fact, especially not when it comes to still largely oral cultures.

To understand how Direct Speech is used in a given narrative tradition, it is important not to impose an a priori conception derived from our own cultural background, but to stick to the facts. Direct Speech is a form of Represented Speech characterised by the fact that the enunciation markers,³⁶ and especially the deictic markers ('I', 'you', 'here', 'now', 'this', 'that', etc.), within the speech are appropriate to the situation of utterance of the speech itself, and not to the situation in which the speech is represented. In other words, the terms 'I', 'here' and 'now' refer to the represented speaker (the character) in the situation where and when they are supposed to have spoken. It differs from Indirect Speech, in which 'I' normally refers to the representer (the narrator), while the represented speaking character is referred to as a 'he' or 'she' set in the past and in the distance.³⁷ Direct Speech is also characterised by the fact it is explicitly identified as Represented Speech by a reporting clause or inquit (for example, 'he said'), and

³⁴ It is interesting to note that in the article quoted above, Tannen sees writing ('a transcript') as the only possible way someone might remember something verbatim. Even tape-recording is not considered enough to assist accurate memorisation.

³⁵ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, pp. 22 and 99. Concerning the issue of the influence of the development of literacy on attitudes towards discourse and memory, see also Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, and especially *Orality and Literacy*. See also Tannen, *Spoken and Written Language* and, concerning Direct Speech more specifically, Coulmas, 'Reported Speech: Some General Issues'.

³⁶ 'Enunciation markers' is a generic term to designate all the traces of the situation of utterance in the utterance itself, i.e. all the traces of subjectivity (in a linguistic sense). The category includes deictic markers, evaluative vocabulary, aspect, modality and pragmatic markers. On linguistic subjectivity, see further below, beginning of Chapter 3.

³⁷ Except for first-person narratives, of course, in which there are two 'I's: one set in the narrated past and the other in the present of utterance.

sometimes also by specific punctuation (usually a comma followed by a quotation mark in Present-Day English). In that, it differs from Free Direct Speech, which lacks the *inquit*.

So, is the form of Direct Speech, such as it has been described, necessarily imitative, as Plato suggested? Traces of the Platonic opposition between *mimesis* and *diegesis* can still be found in many accounts of Represented Speech, although the vocabulary used nowadays is usually slightly different. Most often, following Clark and Gerrig,³⁸ *telling* is opposed to *showing* rather than to imitating, but the idea still lingers that Direct Speech and Indirect Speech correspond to two very different activities.

It is perhaps regrettable that Plato, and not Aristotle, had such lasting influence on this particular issue. The great popularity of Plato's theory should not lead us to forget the philosopher's relative lack of interest in, and even distrust of, poetry.³⁹ In many ways, the interpretation offered by Aristotle in his *Poetics* is much more sensitive to the nature of poetry. For Aristotle, all poetry, and all art generally speaking, is imitation, however it is done,⁴⁰ so, for him, both Direct and Indirect Speech are imitative. To sum up very briefly the attitudes of the two Greek philosophers, Plato sees two essentially distinct activities, imitating and telling, where Aristotle sees only one activity, imitating (i.e. representing), and many ways to achieve it.

Aristotle's perspective reflects the reality of discursive practice much better than Plato's. In fact, there are not just two forms of Represented Speech but multiple forms, which may differ from each other more or less sharply.⁴¹ If it is easy to see how many different forms could correspond to many different tools used by the poet, it is much harder to imagine how all those forms could correspond to distinct activities

³⁸ Clark and Gerrig, 'Quotations as Demonstrations'.

³⁹ Plato saw poetry as an educational tool at best and as a distraction at worst: 'we ourselves would use a more austere and less pleasing poet and teller of tales for the sake of benefit, one who would imitate the style of the decent man and would say what he says in those models that we set down as laws at the beginning, when we undertook to educate the soldiers' (Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato*, 398b).

⁴⁰ 'Now epic-making and the making of tragedy, and comedy too, and the art of making dithyrambs, and most of the art of composing to the flute and lyre – all these happen to be, by and large, *mimeseis*. But these arts differ from one another in three respects: for they do their *mimesis* (a) in different matter (in-what), (b) on different subjects (of-what), and (c) by different methods (how).' 1, 1447a. The translation is taken from Whalley's edition, pp. 45–7.

⁴¹ Rosier, *Le discours rapporté*, pp. 125–60. See also Combettes, 'Énoncé, énonciation et discours rapporté'. The best-known forms are Free Direct Speech, Direct Speech, Free Indirect Speech, Indirect Speech and Narrated Speech, but each category may encompass several variants. This is especially true for Free Indirect Speech, which is characterised by a mix of enunciation markers appropriate to the character and to the narrator: the form is always mixed, but the same category of markers may be appropriate to the character in one case and to the narrator in another.

and, if so, what activities exactly. According to Rosier,⁴² the forms of Represented Speech should not be seen as radically distinct devices, but as a continuum from Narrated Speech to Direct Speech, i.e. from less to more actualised forms.

That notion of actualisation is very important. It may refer to several phenomena. All definitions, whether from the field of linguistics or philosophy, concur on the fact that it corresponds to a change from potentiality to actuality. It may designate, for instance, the way in which elements of the language (understood as an abstract system) may be used in a given context. It may also refer to the capacity of some linguistic markers to attribute existence to an object.⁴³ Additionally, events belonging to a time and place distinct from the situation of utterance (e.g. past or hypothetical events) are, from the reference point of that situation, lacking in actuality. Therefore, actualisation may also designate all the markers that attribute existence to an object in the situation of utterance, that is, typically, proximal deictic markers such as 'here', 'now', 'you', 'I' and 'this'. Direct Speech is rich in such markers, which enables it to give more 'existence' to the represented speech. It goes without saying that this has nothing to do with actual existence in real life: the 'existence' or 'actuality' referred to here is only discursive.

The actualising properties of Direct Speech are the reasons why it is often described as particularly vivid, or life-like. The linguistic phenomenon of actualisation is not unlike the literary phenomenon of the reality effect,⁴⁴ which is also a device designed not to attest to a reality, but to produce the impression of reality. The two merely differ in that the former relies on linguistic properties whereas the latter also relies on narrative and cultural conventions in order to be effective.

Such phenomena are closely connected to the notion of imitation, but a good understanding of how they work should make it clear that imitation cannot be interpreted in the Platonic sense. For Plato, imitation is essentially the copy of an existing object, which is itself only the copy of an abstract form (or idea, *eidos*). Such a conception is incompatible with the notion of actualisation: to actualise something is to give it reality or, rather, to give it a reality effect. It is a creative process, not a derivative one. If one understands imitation as Aristotle does, as a true representation and not as a mere copy, then it is fully compatible with the notion of actualisation.

⁴² Rosier, *Le discours rapporté*, pp. 133–60.

⁴³ A good example of the latter phenomenon is the determiner 'some' in Present-Day English, which, unlike 'any', presupposes the existence (or at least the possible existence) of the designated object.

⁴⁴ The reality effect is a concept invented by Barthes in 'L'effet de réel'. Barthes is particularly interested in the superfluous details that, in realistic descriptions, take the represented world closer to the actual world, but the concept may be extended to any device serving the same function.

One of the strengths of Aristotle's analysis is its fine delineation of the complex relations between poetry and truth or reality, through the concept of verisimilitude. He argues that the poet must not relate what actually happened but what could happen, and that it is better to represent something impossible but convincing rather than to represent something possible but unconvincing (*Poetics*, 9, 1451a). In other words, what matters is not the reproduction of what already exists but the production of a representation believable by the audience.

According to Mercier, such belief is based on four types of conventions shared by the author and the audience: generic, empirical, pragmatic and diegetic conventions.⁴⁵ To sum up, generic verisimilitude has to do with the horizon of expectations set up by the genre,⁴⁶ empirical verisimilitude with common experience; pragmatic verisimilitude with the credibility of the narrator and the narrating situation; and diegetic verisimilitude with the inner logic of the plot. Verisimilitude relies thus on two types of knowledge: what the audience knows (or believe they know) about the world, but also, and very importantly, what they know about literature. Each genre prescribes not only the type of events that can legitimately happen, but also the devices that may be used to represent them convincingly. A good example is the case of the omniscient narrator, which is highly unlikely empirically, but has become a staple device of the realistic novel and is now fully accepted by the audience.⁴⁷

As a conclusion, Direct Speech may be redefined thus: it is not the transposition or the copy of a pre-existing speech, but the actualised representation of a speech within another discourse (for example a narrative), achieved through the use of certain enunciation markers (first- and second-person pronouns, present tense, 'here' and 'now', etc.), which promote the illusion that the situations of utterance of the represented speech and the representing discourse coincide, i.e. promoting the illusion that a character exists and speaks in the same time and place as where the story is told.

The linguistic characteristics of Direct Speech thus predispose it to create an illusion of reality, but the exact form taken by that illusion is likely to vary a great deal according to the type of discourse considered. Direct Speech may very well contribute to verisimilitude but there is no reason why that verisimilitude should be strictly empirical or conform to the conventions set by other genres. On the contrary, it may be based on generic, pragmatic and diegetic conventions that

⁴⁵ Mercier, 'La vraisemblance' (§ 14 of 15).

⁴⁶ The notion of horizon of expectations ('Erwartungshorizont') is due to Jauss, in *Literaturgeschichte als provokation*, pp. 144–208. The book was translated into English by Bahti as *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

⁴⁷ Cavillac, 'Vraisemblance pragmatique et autorité fictionnelle'.

go against common experience and the expectations of present-day readers.

For the apparent strangeness of Direct Speech in Old English poetry to make sense, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon in the context of a specific poetic tradition and its own conventions. The most striking characteristics of Direct Speech seem to be shared by all Old English narrative poems, which suggests that the extant corpus is relatively homogeneous. However, there might be more subtle differences between certain groups of poems, which is why it is important to consider a relatively large and rich corpus.

Corpus and Methodology

Selecting a corpus likely to be genuinely representative of the Old English poetic tradition as a whole is a task fraught with much difficulty. Not only are we necessarily deprived of all the poetry that may have been composed orally and never preserved on parchment, but only a fraction of the manuscript production of the period survives to our time. Most of the extant poetry is preserved in four manuscripts, which owe their preservation to reasons largely unrelated to their literary merits.⁴⁸

Furthermore, it is almost impossible to determine where and when any individual poem was composed. All we know for sure is that the poems were first committed to writing somewhere in Anglo-Saxon England between the beginning of Christianisation (and thus literacy) in the seventh century and the copying of the manuscripts at the turn of the eleventh. Whether the mix of dialects exhibited by most poems reflects the history of their transmission or the existence of a poetic dialect mixing several influences remains hotly debated,⁴⁹ though not as hotly, perhaps, as the question of the poems' dates of composition. Among the various criteria used for dating, linguistic ones are the least subjective and therefore the most reliable, but they are not entirely satisfactory. First of all, they only allow relative and not absolute dating. Second, the validity of some linguistic criteria has been called into question, most famously by Amos.⁵⁰ Fulk's *History of Old English Meter*

⁴⁸ The Exeter Book was likely preserved because it was useful as a cutting board and to store gold leaf, whereas the continued interest in Junius after the eleventh century is probably due to its illustrations. See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, vol. 1, pp. 1–2 and *Ms. Junius 11*, especially the first section of the introduction, 'The Work, its Date, Provenance and Subsequent History'.

⁴⁹ The theory of a common dialect was put forward by Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, pp. 119–39. It is accepted by many, but not by all, see Gneuss, *Language and History in Early England*, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Amos, *Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts*.

takes Amos's arguments into account and presents strong evidence, but it too has been criticised for its insufficient consideration of metrical issues and of recent research on phonology,⁵¹ so the debate is still very much open. However, Fulk's study is comprehensive enough to constitute a useful point of reference, and his conclusions will occasionally be referred to in this book.

Very little is known, then, of the context(s) in which the different extant poems were composed and received. The research undertaken for more than a century can compensate for that decontextualisation to some extent, but it can also introduce anachronisms and thus alter our perception of the texts. Feminist writers have shown, for example, how prejudices of the turn of the twentieth century still colour our perception of female characters in Old English poems.⁵² One may legitimately wonder whether the relatively few texts preserved have enough in common to allow for meaningful comparisons and whether what little we know about them is enough to draw conclusions on the conventions of the Old English poetic tradition as a whole.

To answer those questions, it is necessary to recontextualise the poems as much as possible. To that end, three main avenues may be explored. One may choose to focus not on the context of production of the poems, which is largely beyond our reach, but on the only known context of their reception – the manuscript. The cultural and political context at the time of the copy is of limited use for a study focused on a linguistic device, but several characteristics of the manuscript itself – the order in which the texts are presented, their layout, punctuation and, in some cases, their illustrations – may provide useful clues on how the poems were read.

It is also possible to compare the poems with their Latin sources, when such a source exists.⁵³ It inevitably restricts the field of investigation to the texts most likely to be heavily influenced by a foreign tradition, but it can also shed light on the method of composition. Most importantly, it may reveal what forms are considered acceptable or not by the poet: a systematic tendency to avoid a particular device, if it is found in several distinct texts, is strongly indicative of an existing norm.

The oral-formulaic tradition may also constitute a valid textual context.⁵⁴ The same themes and formulas appear in numerous texts, varying slightly from one instance to another. Comparing several such instances may allow the critic to identify an invariant at the core of the formula, and thus the norm against which each instance should be measured.

⁵¹ Blake, 'A History of Old English Meter. R. D. Fulk'.

⁵² See in particular Renoir, 'Eve's I.Q. Rating' and Bloomfield, 'Diminished by Kindness'.

⁵³ This method is strongly advocated by Hill in 'Literary History and Old English Poetry'.

⁵⁴ This view is defended in particular by Renoir in *A Key to Old Poems*.

The three methods are not mutually exclusive and all of them are used in this volume. Knowing the manuscript context is useful in all cases, of course. Furthermore, there is no reason to draw a strict opposition between texts with and without a Latin source. Texts without a known Latin source may constitute a useful reference point to evaluate the translations and to see if the changes introduced by the poets are coherent with the conventions observed in the 'original' corpus. As for oral-formulaic features, they are present in the entire corpus, even in the most literate and Latinate texts.

Oral-formulaic theory has attracted a fair amount of controversy, so I will clarify how it is understood here. The first proponents of that theory argued that the stylistic characteristics of oral compositions differed radically from those of their written counterparts and that such poems could be transmitted virtually unchanged for generations.⁵⁵ That conception revived the search for a mythical Germanic past,⁵⁶ as critics were encouraged to test existing poems in order to determine which ones were genuinely oral – i.e. which ones potentially dated back to the dawn of Anglo-Saxon culture – and to discard the rest as less authentic.

That approach was rightly criticised on methodological grounds: as early as 1956, Schaar noted that 'the proposition "all formulaic poetry is oral" does not follow, either logically or psychologically, from the proposition "all oral poetry is formulaic"'.⁵⁷ Following Ong's work on orality and literacy,⁵⁸ a new conception of oral-formulaic poetry arose, taking into account the possibility of a 'transitional' culture: no longer completely oral, but not yet as fully literate as our own, in which illiteracy has become synonymous with social exclusion. One interesting conclusion of that approach is that even the most literate Anglo-Latin texts did not presuppose an attitude to writing identical to our own.

The shift towards a 'transitional' view of Anglo-Saxon culture took the focus away from the mostly unknown oral Germanic past and onto the period in which the extant Old English poems were preserved on parchment. For O'Brien O'Keeffe, the way that Old English poems are copied – in continuous lines, with very little punctuation, variable spelling and irregular word division – shows that they required a mode of reception close to that of oral poetry:

⁵⁵ The founding studies are: Parry, 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I' and Lord, *The Singer of Tales*. For Old English poetry more specifically, see also Magoun, 'The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry'; Creed, 'The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem'.

⁵⁶ On that trend in Anglo-Saxon studies, and especially on the figure of the oral poet in that myth, see Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*; Frank, 'The Search for the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet'; and Niles, 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet'.

⁵⁷ Schaar, 'On a New Theory of Old English Poetic Diction', p. 303. See also Benson, 'The Literary Character of Anglo-Saxon Formulaic Poetry'.

⁵⁸ Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*, and especially *Orality and Literacy*.

A reader of Old English necessarily brought a great deal of predictive knowledge to the text to be read, precisely because the manuscripts are low both in orthographic redundancy and in graphic cues. This knowledge came from a deep understanding of the conventions of Old English verse, marked as it is by formula, generic composition and repetition, in short, by those features generally considered necessary for the successful transmission of oral-poetry in non-literate cultures ... the nature of the Old English poetic works transmitted, the character of their manuscripts, and the record of their variance (in multiply-attested works) indicate that early readers of Old English verse read by applying oral techniques for the reception of a message to the decoding of a written text.⁵⁹

In the wake of studies such as *The Invention of Tradition*,⁶⁰ our understanding of oral tradition has also evolved. It is no longer seen as a treasure handed down from generation to generation but as a mode of expression and an identity marker: a way for a community to construct its identity through perceived continuity with a more or less distant and mythical past. It has also been pointed out that a tradition is not monolithic, but particulate: it is a complex, organised body of forms, ideas, patterns and practices in use within a certain community.⁶¹ A given instance of traditional behaviour (be it a poetic performance or something else) only ever uses parts of the traditional material available and, as a consequence, tradition can never be handed down whole: each new performance of traditional behaviour is a reworking of parts of the existing tradition.

Foley and others have noted that poetic diction works like a special language, meaning both that it achieves more than ordinary language, but that it shares many of the essential properties of ordinary language (particularly regarding how it is acquired and how it conveys meaning).⁶² In fact, the comparison with ordinary language is

⁵⁹ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 21. In that book, she examines several texts that are preserved in multiple manuscripts (Caedmon's *Hymn*, but also *Solomon and Saturn* and the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*) and shows that the variants are typical of oral-formulaic transmission, in that they respect the constraints of the context and the diction. Scribes apparently paid special attention to the formulas' main keywords and completed them according to their own knowledge, without necessarily striving for verbatim reproduction (see pp. 39–46).

⁶⁰ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

⁶¹ On tradition as particulate, see in particular Drouot (*How Tradition Works*; and *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature*), who borrows from Dawkins the concept of 'meme' to describe a 'small unit of culture that reproduces in minds' in direct reference to genes, understood as small units of biological information that reproduce in cells. Regarding traditional poetry, formulas, type-scenes and themes were long recognised as the basic units, but Foley has shown that there is a whole spectrum of traditional phraseology, which cannot be reduced to three types of units (*Immanent Art*, p. 16).

⁶² For traditional poetic diction as a special 'register' and a special language, see in particular Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance*, pp. 82–92 and *How to Read an Oral Poem*, p. 127 ('Oral Poetry Works Like Language, Only More So'). Mize also makes the interesting

valid not just for discursive traditions, but for all forms of traditional behaviours.

Like language, tradition does not exist as such. It can only be reconstructed and studied through observable performances, just as language can only be reconstructed and studied through observable texts and speeches. Like language, tradition is a complex system, constantly under (internal and external) pressure to evolve in new directions, while maintaining a strong-enough continuity that day-to-day practitioners may have no idea that the system is evolving (though they are apt to think that younger practitioners are less competent than their elders, partly because the system used by younger practitioners may already be different in some ways). Again, like language, tradition conveys meaning through the use of fixed forms that are conventionally (and thus to some extent arbitrarily) connected to certain meanings.⁶³ And finally, like language, tradition plays a major role in signalling and constructing a communal identity.⁶⁴

Once tradition is seen in that light, it becomes obvious that innovations cannot be seen as the destruction or even the disruption of an ancient heritage. They are an integral part of the traditional process. What is interesting is that tradition typically advertises itself as permanent and unchanging (see for example, what Drout calls the 'Universal Tradition Meme': 'because we have always done so'),⁶⁵ even though we know it is everything but. As a consequence, tradition always

point that 'formulaic sequences are processed cognitively as wordlike entities', which implies that 'they have the same capacity for nuanced and creative deployments as do lexemes themselves' (*Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 108).

⁶³ The fact that the connection between form and meaning is largely arbitrary in languages as we know them (with a few exceptions, as in the case of onomatopoeia) is one of the basic tenets of modern linguistics, as outlined by Saussure (see his *Cours de linguistique générale*). However, some aspects of communication (particularly non-verbal elements) may retain an iconic or indexical connection to the meaning they express, even though that meaning is at least partly conventionalised. It is likely that the same goes for traditional practices – i.e. just because they carry a conventional meaning does not necessarily mean that the connection between form and meaning has become completely arbitrary.

⁶⁴ In his works on tradition, Drout prefers to use a biological model to explain how tradition works. However, such a model is problematic in that it seems to suggest a linear filiation. A good example of that problem is offered by Drout's treatment of the 'Happy Birthday' meme: according to him, 'We can trace a single "Happy Birthday" meme spreading by being copied when a person who has never heard it before is exposed to the meme. After that copying event there is one copy of "Happy Birthday to You" in the first individual's mind and another in the second.' (*Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, p. 16). In fact, common experience suggests that this is not how such a meme spreads. At home and at birthday parties elsewhere, children are repeatedly exposed to the song (often long before they can understand its words) until they know it by heart and can sing it on their own without help. It is extremely rare for someone to learn that meme from just one model. Similarly, it seems likely that most traditional items spread through repeated exposure from various sources rather than from the replication of a single model (such replication would actually be more characteristic of modern intertextuality).

⁶⁵ Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, p. 3.

contains an element of fiction. As Pasternack puts it, 'Tradition relies on memory and on new statements sounding *as if* they have always been a part of the community's memory' (my emphasis).⁶⁶ It seems as if the point of tradition is to provide stability and legitimacy by integrating new elements into an existing system and promoting the illusion that they have always been part of the system, thereby negating the threat inherent to anything new or unknown.

As a consequence, the fact that an element is recognised as 'traditional' does nothing to prove its antiquity. On the other hand, when a body of texts use the same 'traditional' features,⁶⁷ they claim allegiance to a shared textual community through that shared reference and thus demand that we examine them within the context of that community. While there are legitimate doubts regarding whether all the extant Old English poems originate from the same social sphere, geographical area and time frame (and in some cases there is even a certainty that they do not), most scholars will agree that they do share such a common reference and this, in turn, legitimates the decision to examine them as a whole, even if that whole is by no means homogeneous.

The exact position of tradition in relation to the text is a complex issue, which probably still needs to be refined in future years. Pasternack offers the stimulating view that 'the "implied tradition" functions as does the "implied author" in other texts except that the entity invoked is not a particular subjectivity but a mode of thought understood to be long-accepted by the community'.⁶⁸ The comparison to the function of the author is particularly apt, especially if 'author' is understood in its strongest sense, as the authority behind the text (*auctor*). It also works well to account for the apparent lack of an individual voice behind most Old English poems.

At the same time, Pasternack's view is slightly problematic in that it seems to deny agency to the poet. By contrast, Foley prefers to think of tradition as an 'enabling referent' that is summoned by the performer rather than as an authoring entity.⁶⁹ We can compare it to Proust's famous 'madeleine' calling to mind all the memories attached to Combray and its surroundings:⁷⁰ in the same way, the traditional motif evokes all the contexts in which it has been met before, so that its expressive power far exceeds its literal meaning.⁷¹ Much like Foley,

⁶⁶ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 74.

⁶⁷ Or even explicitly claim a connection to the same form of traditional poetry, as when Old English poems choose to represent the figure of a traditional *scop*, as in *Beowulf*, *Deor* and *Widsith*. On that topic, see Niles 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet'.

⁶⁸ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 62.

⁶⁹ See in particular Foley, *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (the phrase 'enabling referent' is used in the preface, p. 14, and in the introduction, p. 1, but the idea is developed throughout the book).

⁷⁰ Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, pp. 44–7.

⁷¹ See for instance Foley, 'Texts That Speak to Readers Who Hear'.

Drout is wary of seeing tradition as an actor (a 'nebulous force' as he puts it) in the creative process.⁷²

There might be some desirable middle ground between regarding tradition as a driving force or as a passive tool. The Bakhtinian notion of polyphony, as developed by the likes of Anscombe and Ducrot, may provide a useful model, even if it was not originally designed to address the issue of traditional discourse. Broadly speaking, linguists use the notion of polyphony to describe the fact that a given discourse is not a closed, self-sufficient entity, but that it typically reflects and engages with other discourses, i.e. with a plurality of voices and points of view. This is particularly obvious in the use of proverbs, represented speech, quotations or ironic statements, but all discourses are polyphonic to some extent. Polyphony does not deny agency to the speaker, but it recognises the fact that a speaker is typically engaged in an interaction rather than a mere action, which, in turn, supposes that they are not the sole bearer of agency.

I believe a similar view might be fruitfully applied to traditional texts, even if it is understood that traditional polyphony has its own specificities. The poet has agency, but, by using traditional diction, they choose to engage and interact with other members of the community. Tradition, of course, is not an actual force endowed with intent. It is an abstraction, a name we give to the numerous discourses that contribute to the elaboration of a common special language (a common 'register' in Foley's terminology). Not only were those discourses produced by people who had their own agency, but the discourses themselves have agency in that they may influence others in ways that were not predicted by their authors.

As a consequence, Old English poems may be seen as a group of discourses that, through their choice to use the same traditional language, signal their willing participation to an ongoing conversation. As such, not only is it legitimate to consider that extant Old English poems are united by more than just chance, but it is crucial to read individual texts against a larger intertextual background.

While modern intertextuality often requires the reader to recognise a specific text, traditional intertextuality is more diffuse, as explained by Renoir and Pasternack:

With written rhetoric, the statement calls to mind a specific work or group of works whose conscious evocation informs our interpretation of the immediate context ... With oral-formulaic rhetoric, on the contrary, the statement calls to mind a paradigmatic situation whose conscious

⁷² Drout, *Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, p. 2. See also Mize (*Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 108), who insists on the 'active personal agency' of the individual poet.

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or unconscious evocation informs our interpretation of the immediate context⁷³

In traditional texts ... the formulaic sound of the language, the very expectedness of an idea's expression, elicits intertextual resonances ... Yet, because by its nature formulaic language appears in many places instead of being specific to one context, people hearing the echoes may bring to their experiences diverse intertexts.⁷⁴

The notion of diverse intertexts is particularly important. It means that there is no perfectly complete vision of the Old English poetic tradition that would have been directly accessible to any learned Anglo-Saxon person but is now irretrievably lost to us. There were only ever multiple and partial visions of the tradition. The vision we may form based on the extant poetic corpus is undoubtedly partial and distorted – in particular as it is limited to texts that were written down – but it is not necessarily illegitimate for all that.

For practical reasons, it is easier to focus on a set number of poems, especially when it comes to quantitative analyses. At the same time, a study based on only one or two poems, however emblematic, could not hope to provide any insight into the conventions observed by the poets of the time. The compromise opted for here is based on two observations. First, certain types of poems (gnomic poetry, elegies, charms, prayers and most psalms) are almost entirely devoid of Direct Speech and therefore largely irrelevant to the issue at stake, which is why the present study exclusively concerns narrative texts, often rich in Direct Speech. Second, the subdivision of Old English narrative poetry into several genres according to subject matter seems to be a largely modern invention, so there seems to be no reason to restrict the analysis to one such genre.⁷⁵

As a consequence, a primary corpus has been selected here, comprising *Genesis A* and *B*, *Christ and Satan*, *Guthlac A*, *Juliana*, *Andreas*, *Elene* and *Beowulf*. Four of those texts are translated from the Latin (*Genesis A*, *Juliana*, *Andreas* and *Elene*), one from Old Saxon (*Genesis B*) and three are presumably original (*Christ and Satan*, *Guthlac A* and *Beowulf*).⁷⁶ They represent all four major poetic codices (Junius, Exeter,

⁷³ Renoir, *A Key to Old Poems*, pp. 88–9. The opposition with written rhetoric is of course too strict here: references to the Oedipus myth in modern literature do not refer the reader to one specific text but to a paradigm that owes as much to Freud as it does to Sophocles.

⁷⁴ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Generally speaking, the notion of clearly distinct literary genres is not characteristic of the medieval period. See Jauss, 'Littérature médiévale et théorie des genres', translated into English by Bahti as 'Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature', in *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, pp. 76–109.

⁷⁶ *Christ and Satan* borrows from many sources, including the Gospels, biblical commentaries and various Old English and Latin homilies, but it is often difficult to identify a specific textual source and the poem as a whole is apparently original (Finnegan, *Christ*

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Vercelli and Nowell) and several 'genres' (biblical, hagiographical and secular). It is hoped that they may provide a reasonably representative view of the extant corpus, even though the selection is slightly biased in favour of longer texts, so as to make quantitative analyses possible whenever necessary. In total, they amount to about ten thousand lines of poetry, including about five thousand lines of Direct Speech. Quantitative analyses are all based on that primary corpus and most in-depth analyses concern extracts from that corpus. That being said, the rest of the extant corpus has not been ignored: on many occasions, the patterns identified in the primary corpus have been checked against other texts to ensure that they were indeed representative.

The aim of this book is to reassess past scholarship on Direct Speech in Old English poetry from a broader perspective in order to determine the norms of Direct Speech in that particular tradition. The approach is therefore inductive rather than deductive. Whenever possible, information from the manuscript context, the formulaic intertext and the potential sources will be used to strengthen analyses and try to avoid anachronistic readings. While no statistically significant inference can be drawn from a corpus so heterogeneous and so small, quantitative data will also be provided as necessary, so readers can judge for themselves how widespread a particular characteristic truly is.

and Satan: *A Critical Edition*, pp. 36–55 and Sleeth, *Studies in Christ and Satan*, pp. 50–67). Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci* is sometimes identified as *Guthlac A*'s source, but the connection between the two texts is at best tenuous (Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, pp. 19–29).

The Form of Direct Speech

Few rhetorical devices are more alien to Old English poetry than stychomythia, the fast alternation of one-line speeches to achieve maximum dramatic intensity. As noted by earlier critics, Old English speeches are typically long and undramatic.¹ While there is no reason to question the validity of that statement, it is necessary to go beyond such a general claim in order to understand why Old English poets favoured a convention so blatantly opposed to our modern taste.² It is particularly worth investigating to what extent Old English poems differ from other early medieval texts in that respect and whether there are some occasions when Old English poets do strive for more vivacity. This chapter examines both the structure and the marking of Direct Speech in the eight poems of the main corpus – *Genesis A* and *B*, *Christ and Satan*, *Guthlac A*, *Juliana*, *Andreas*, *Elene* and *Beowulf* – to attempt to understand the framework in which Old English poets worked.

Structure

Speech Lengths

The structure of Direct Speech in Old English poetry seems to be deliberately designed to hamper interaction. First of all, it is clear that relatively long speeches are the norm for all poems. It is especially true for the speeches of *Beowulf*, *Genesis B* and *Guthlac A*, which show average lengths above twenty-five lines and median lengths around twenty. The other poems show lower figures, with an average length between eleven (*Genesis A*) and sixteen (*Elene*) lines and a median between six (*Christ and Satan*) and ten (*Andreas* and *Juliana*).³ The import of that

¹ See Introduction ('Traditional Views on Direct Speech').

² Nowadays, novelists are usually encouraged 'not to give too much information at once', 'to break up dialogue with action' and 'to avoid the overuse of tags' (Everett, 'Real and Sounding Real'). In other words, massive blocks of Direct Speech should be avoided at all costs.

³ Full figures are as follows: *Genesis A* (average 11.1; median 9.5), *Andreas* (average 14.7; median 10), *Juliana* (average 14.9; median 10), *Christ and Satan* (average 15.1; median 6), *Elene* (average 16.3; median 8.5), *Beowulf* (average 27.6; median 19), *Guthlac A* (average 28;

discrepancy should not be overstated as figures may vary considerably within the same text and, as such, a limited sample cannot have any statistical significance. Still, there might be a correlation between relatively shorter speeches and a greater Latin influence, as most of the texts in the second group are translations from the Latin.⁴

The likelihood of that hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that speeches are usually even more concise in the Latin sources than in the Old English verse translations. Concerning *Genesis A*, *Elene* and *Juliana*, almost all speeches are longer in Old English than in the original and more than half are at least twice as long.⁵ The Latin source likely used by the *Andreas* poet is unfortunately unavailable, but speeches tend to be longer in the Old English poem than in the *recensio casanatensis*, in which they are already quite a bit longer than in the original *Praxeis Andreou*.⁶ In other words, the Old English translators may not have transformed their sources to the point that they became similar to *Beowulf* or *Guthlac A* in their treatment of Direct Speech, but it seems they were taking them in the direction of that model.

The contrast between Old English poems and their Latin sources is particularly striking when it comes to very short speeches. Judging from the cases studied here, extremely long speeches are just as acceptable in Latin as they are in Old English,⁷ but very short speeches are only truly acceptable in Latin, where speeches limited to just a few words are not uncommon. In the Old English corpus examined here, speeches are always at least one line long and instances of very short speeches (two lines long or less) are quite rare.⁸ In

median 24), *Genesis B* (average 28; median 25.5). If the first speech of *Guthlac A* is taken to end earlier (line 10, 17 or 25 instead of 29, which is the limit chosen here), the average is slightly lower but still above 25.

⁴ *Christ and Satan* constitutes an exception: while it shows influences from a number of Latin texts, it is not a translation. See Introduction, n. 76.

⁵ Comparisons between two languages are based on the number of words.

⁶ The Old English poem is closest in content to the Greek *Praxeis Andreou kai Matheian eis ten polin ton anthropophagon* (*The Acts of Andrew and Matthew in the City of the Cannibals*), preserved in manuscripts dating from the ninth to the tenth century. An unknown variant of that legend was probably the source used by the poet, presumably through a Latin version, as Greek was not very widely known in Anglo-Saxon England. None of the existing Latin versions is close enough to the Old English text to be considered an immediate source. The closest available version is the twelfth-century *recensio casanatensis* (Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense 1104, 26–43, edited by Blatt), which expands significantly on the Greek original. It should be considered an analogue rather than an actual source. See Brooks, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, pp. xv–xviii and Boenig, trans., *The Acts of Andrew in the Country of the Cannibals*, p. ii.

⁷ At least in prose hagiographies: *Andreas's* retelling of Jesus' miracles (*Andreas*, 644–817) and Judas's testimony in front of the wise men's assembly (*Elene*, 419b–535) constitute particularly striking instances. On the other hand, neither *Genesis* nor *Genesis A* favours very long speeches.

⁸ Only 12 out of the 289 speeches considered here (not counting those reduced to a few words because of a lacuna): four in *Andreas* (1300–1, 1343–4, 1412–13, 1467b–1468), three in *Christ and Satan* (626–7, 672, 729), two in *Elene* (92b–94a, 683b–684) and *Genesis A*

Guthlac A, *Genesis B* and *Beowulf*, such very short speeches are missing altogether.

When a Latin source contains a very brief speech, the Old English poet usually transforms it in some way. Most often, the poet chooses to expand the speech (e.g. *Genesis A*, 887–902, based on Gen. III.13, or *Juliana*, 144–6, based on *Passio Iulianae*, § 2),⁹ but they may also demote it to Indirect or Narrated Speech (e.g. *Juliana*, 258–9, based on *Passio Iulianae*, § 6, or *Elene*, 667–8, based on *Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 8),¹⁰ or even delete it altogether, whenever it is possible to do so without altering the intelligibility of the text (*Genesis A*, 2846–52a, based on Gen. XXII.1–2, *Andreas*, 469–76a, corresponding to *recensio casanatensis*, § 9). Such transformations are systematic enough to suggest that they do not reflect true choices, individual responses to the specificities of a given text, but an actual rule, which forces the poets to transform their source in order to meet Old English poetic standards.

The exceptions to that rule are few in number,¹¹ but they deserve consideration. In some instances, the brevity of the source seems merely tolerated, as in this passage:

dixit ad eam Agar ancilla Sarai unde venis et quo vadis (Gen. XVI.8)¹²

þær hie wuldres þegn,
engel drihtnes an gemitte
geomormode, se hie georne frægn:
'Hwider fundast þu, feascraft ides,
siðas dreogan? þec Sarre ah.' (*Genesis A*, 2268b–2272)¹³

As in most of *Genesis A*, the poet follows the source rather closely, but not slavishly.¹⁴ The angel's question retains the brevity of the original,

(2271–2, 2895–6), one in *Juliana* (317–18). Several correspond to limit cases: in *Christ and Satan* (672) the devil is actually 'slipping' from Narrated to Direct Speech, while *Elene* (92b–94a) translates the Latin inscription IN HOC VINCE ('Vanquish by this'). On the notion of slipping, see Schuelke, "'Slipping" in Indirect Discourse', and Richman, 'Artful Slipping in Old English'.

⁹ The text of the *Passio Iulianae* used in this book is that edited by Lapidge. In several instances (though not in all: the reverse is true for 539b–540a, 660b and perhaps also 457a), it is closer to *Juliana* than the text edited in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

¹⁰ The text of the *Inventio sanctae crucis* used here is that of the *Acta Sanctorum*. The text edited by Holder is based on an older set of manuscripts, but it is not demonstrably much closer to the version used by Cynewulf. It will occasionally be referred to when the two versions differ significantly.

¹¹ See above, this chapter, n. 8.

¹² 'He said to her: "Hagar, handmaid of Sarai, where do you come from and where are you going?"'

¹³ 'There, a thane of glory, an angel of the lord found her, full of sorrow, and asked her earnestly: "In which direction are you attempting to journey, destitute lady? Sarah owns you."' See also *Genesis A*, 2895–6; *Andreas*, 1343–4 and perhaps also 1300–1 and 1467b–1468.

¹⁴ On the poet's handling of the source, see Doane, *Genesis A*, pp. 49–58; Stévanovitch, *La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, pp. 195–200; and Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse*,

but Hagar's answer is dealt with much more freely, drawing on the Old English poetic theme of exile:¹⁵

quae respondit a facie Sarai dominae meae ego fugio (Gen. XVI.8)¹⁶

Heo him ædre andswarode:
'Ic fleah wean, wana wilna gehwilces,
hlæfdigan hete, hean of wicum,
tregan and teonan. Nu sceal tearighleor
on westenne witodes bidan,
hwonne of heortan hunger oððe wulf
sawle and sorge somed abregde.' (*Genesis A*, 2273–9)¹⁷

The fact that only one of the two speeches was kept as brief as the original shows that the poet made a choice and did not just feel compelled to keep the question brief out of respect for the source. The reasons behind that choice are slightly harder to decipher as the brevity of the question serves no obvious rhetorical purpose. In fact, it is likely a default choice. The question is not kept brief in preference to the answer, but rather the answer is developed because it allows for a striking use of the theme of exile, whereas the question has no such potential. The changes effected by the poet transform the tempo of the exchange considerably. In the source, several brief speeches allow for a fast-paced dialogue. A single brief speech cannot produce any such effect. In *Genesis A*, the impression of spontaneous interaction is completely gone, replaced with an elegiac piece. The concision of the angel's question is not meant to quicken the action but, if anything, to better draw attention to the expression of Hagar's sorrow. The poet could very well have demoted the question to Narrated Speech as in *Genesis A*, 862–5a. That they did not do so suggests that very short speeches could be tolerated, but it does not really challenge the general preference for longer speeches.

In a very few instances, brevity seems truly deliberate. In *Christ and Satan*, it is used twice to reinforce the impact of final condemnations (622–7 and 727–9), but the most skilful uses are to be found in Cynewulf's works. Juliana's questioning of the demon is entirely

pp. 98–148. Doane and Remley show that the source used by the poet is close to the Vulgate, but shows some *vetus latina* influence. The text used for comparison in this book is that of the Vulgate, as edited by Weber.

¹⁵ Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry'. The references to the place left behind, to sorrow and to deprivation are all characteristic of the theme.

¹⁶ 'She answered: "As for me, I flee from the sight of my mistress, Sarai"'.

¹⁷ 'At once she answered him: "'I have fled the pain, the hatred of my mistress, deprived of every desirable thing, unhappy; I have left my dwelling, fled suffering and abuse. Now I shall, my cheeks covered with tears, face my appointed fate in the wilderness, when from my heart hunger or a wolf will tear away both my soul and my sorrow.'"

restructured by the poet to emphasise the contrast between the sharp questions of the saint and the lengthy answers of her antagonist. It is particularly striking in this passage:

Beata Iuliana dixit: 'Quis te misit ad me?' Dæmon respondit: 'Satanas pater meus.' Sancta Iuliana dixit: 'Et quomodo dicitur pater tuus?' Dæmon respondit: 'Belzebul.' Sancta Iuliana dixit: 'Quod est opus ipsius?' Dæmon respondit: 'Totius mali inuentor ...' (*Passio Iulianae*, § 8)¹⁸

Him seo halge oncwæð
þurh gæstes giefte, Iuliana:
'Þu scealt furþor gen, feond moncynnes,
siþfæt secgan, hwa þec sende to me.'
Hyre se aglæca ageaf ondsware,
forhtafongen, friþes orwena:
'Hwæt, mec min fæder on þas fore to þe,
hellwarena cyning, hider onsende
of þam engan ham, se is yfla gehwæs
in þam grornhofe geornfulra þonne ic. (*Iuliana*, 315b–324)¹⁹

The rapid-fire of questions and answers is replaced by a single question and a gushing flow of words responding to it, allowing for a sharp contrast between the saint – uncompromising and fully in control – and the cowardly demon compelled to obey her. In *Elene*, Cynewulf also modifies his source to develop a contrast between shorter and longer speeches, though the effect is more subtle. The scene opposing Elene and Judas (604–90) shows the progressive domination of the empress. At first, Judas's speeches are longer, but when Elene starts attacking Judas's lies, reminding him that his people know of much older events than Jesus' death (643–54) and then calling him a liar outright (663–6), the balance of power shifts in her favour.

Cynewulf's use of contrast between shorter and longer speeches over long exchanges is remarkable and without parallel in the corpus examined here. It is a witness to the poet's taste for experimentation,

¹⁸ 'The blessed Juliana said: "Who sends you to me?" The demon answered: "Satan, my father." Saint Juliana said: "And what is your father's name?" The demon answered: "Beelzebub." Saint Juliana said: "What is his occupation?" The demon answered: "Inventor of everything evil..."'

¹⁹ 'Through the grace of the spirit, the saint answered him, Juliana: "You shall, enemy of mankind, tell me more concerning your expedition and who sends you to me." The miserable being gave her an answer, seized with fear and deprived of any hope for a truce: "Listen! My father sent me here on this trip from the too narrow home, the king of the denizens of hell, who is more zealous than I am in all things evil, inside the house of sorrow." The demon's answer is twenty-four lines long in total and corresponds to four different speeches in the original.'

noted by Calder.²⁰ The extent of that originality should not be overstated, however. Cynewulf is interested in contrast – a fundamental element of Old English poetics – not in fast-paced dialogue. Neither he nor the other Old English poets ever used short speeches to imitate the rapidity and vivacity of real-life conversations.

Structure of Exchanges

Another clue to the Old English poets' lack of interest in naturalistic dialogue is the way that exchanges are structured. Most exchanges are quite short, with only two or three turns of talk.²¹ In fact, only the three hagiographic poems translated from the Latin (*Andreas*, *Elene* and *Juliana*) contain exchanges of more than four speeches,²² and even they tend to reduce the number of turns of talk by comparison with their sources: the longest exchange in *Andreas*, before Andreas and his companions climb on board the boat that will take them to Mermedonia (256–348) has 10 speeches, against 13 in the *recensio casanatensis* and 12 in the *Praxeis Andreou*,²³ while the longest in *Juliana*, when the saint and the demon argue in prison (289–530a), has 9 speeches left after a lacuna, against 13 in the *Passio Iulianae* from that point onwards (16 in total).

The hagiographic genre is partial to debates opposing the saint to those who (out of love or villainy) are intent on testing their faith, so that relatively long verbal exchanges tend to be central to such texts. *Guthlac A* respects the conventions of the genre in that it represents a verbal battle between the saint and the demons inhabiting the fens, but, strikingly enough, that battle is only constituted of short exchanges (two or three turns of talk). The fact that *Guthlac A* is the only 'native' hagiographic text in the corpus tends to confirm the idea that long exchanges are tolerated to a large extent in Old English poetic translations but that they are not spontaneously favoured by Old English poets.

The typical exchanges of Old English poetry are thus very different from those of authentic conversations, which usually include many more turns of talk. The reduction of exchanges to only two or three

²⁰ Calder, *Cynewulf*, p. 143: 'This marked variety suggests that for Cynewulf each poem was a conscious experiment, that within the limits of his inherited stylistic traditions and the restrictions of his own habitual manner of expression, Cynewulf attempted something quite different in each work and did so in a distinctly individual way.'

²¹ Out of 53 exchanges in the corpus examined here, 31 are comprised of only two speeches, 14 of three speeches and only 8 of more than three speeches. In total, two-speech exchanges amount to 62 speeches, three-speech exchanges to 42 and more-than-three-speech exchanges to 55.

²² Up to ten in *Andreas* and *Elene*, and only nine in *Juliana*. However, the lacuna before line 289 in *Juliana* suggests that the complete exchange contained at least ten speeches as well.

²³ According to Boenig's translation of the text (*The Acts of Andrew*).

turns undermines their very nature as exchanges, i.e. as interaction. Interaction supposes reciprocal action, that is to say the possibility for an action to produce a reaction, which in turn may have an impact on the first actor. The typical exchanges of Old English poetry only allow for minimal interaction at best and very often only for an action–reaction pattern. This type of pattern is quite typical, for instance, of the way demons are rejected by their adversaries, as in this extract from *Genesis B*:²⁴

Ongon hine þa frinan forman worde
se laða mid ligenum: ‘Langað þe awuht,
Adam, up to gode? Ic eom on his ærende hider
feorran gefered, ne þæt nu fyn ne wæs
þæt ic wið hine sylfne sæt. Þa het he me on þysne sið faran,
het þæt þu þisses ofætes æte ... Þe sende waldend god,
þin hearra þas helpe of heofonrice.’
Adam maðelode þær he on eorðan stod,
selfscafte guma: ‘Þonne ic sigedrihten,
mihtigne god, mæðlan gehyrde
strangre stemne ... he cwæð þæt þa sweartan helle
healdan sceolde se ðe bi his heortan wuht
laðes gelæde ... Þy ic þe hyran ne cann,
ac þu meaht þe forð faran. Ic hæbbe me fæstne geleafan
up to þam ælmihtegan gode þe me mid his earmum worhte,
her mid handum sinum. He mæg me of his hean rice
geofian mid goda gehwilcum, þeah he his gingran ne sende.’
Wende hine wraðmod þær he þæt wif geseah
on eorðrice Euan stondan,
sceone gesceapene (*Genesis B*, 495–549a)²⁵

The initial attack is met with a counter-attack that elicits no answer. On the contrary, a new narrative episode starts immediately, as if Adam’s answer was enough to bring an end to the conversation.

Such an exchange corresponds rather closely to what pragmatics call adjacency pairs:

²⁴ See also *Guthlac A* (452–512 and 579–683a), *Andreas* (1362–85) and *Elene* (902–52a). Two of the exchanges between Juliana and Eleusius (166–83 and 579–683a) also fit that pattern to a certain extent, even though the enemy rejected is human there.

²⁵ ‘With these first words, the hateful being then started to question him with lies: “Is there anything you wish from God above, Adam? I have come here from afar to convey his message: it has not been long since I sat close to him in person. Then he commanded me to go on this trip, he commanded that you ate of this fruit ... The reigning king your lord sends this help from the kingdom of heaven.” Adam spoke formally, from where he stood on earth, a man created without parents: “When I heard the victorious lord speak, the powerful God, with a strong voice ... he said that he who did anything evil of his own will would have to dwell in the black hell ... That is why I cannot obey you and you must go on your way. I have a strong faith in almighty God above, who created me with his arms and hands here. He may give me any good thing from his kingdom above, even if he does not send his messenger.” Full of anger, he turned to where he had seen the woman stand in the earthly kingdom, Eve, created beautiful’.

The Form of Direct Speech

[A]djacency pairs are sequences of two utterances that are:

- (i) adjacent
- (ii) produced by different speakers
- (iii) ordered as a first part and a second part
- (iv) typed, so that a particular first part requires a particular second (or range of second parts) – e.g. offers require acceptances or rejections, greetings require greetings, and so on²⁶

In authentic situations of communication, however, an adjacency pair rarely constitutes a complete conversation. Rather, it is one of the basic units of which a conversation is made. Literary dialogues are always simplified to some extent, of course:

Characters in novels or plays do not speak in the same way as real people do when they talk to each other. Recordings of genuine spoken exchanges show that written representations of these have been stylized or ‘purified’. Spoken exchanges in novels are grammatically and syntactically correct; they are more concise than real-life conversations since numerous repetitions, rephrasings, fillers and many other features of spoken conversation have been eliminated.²⁷

Still, it is one thing to simplify but quite another to reduce an entire conversation to two speeches. With only one turn of talk per character, it is impossible to represent the evolution of a point of view *in* and *through* speech. The point of view expressed is given once and for all and there can be no negotiation – i.e. no mutual adjustment mechanisms – which is often considered an essential component of authentic conversations.²⁸ The absence of negotiation plays a critical part in the impression that Old English poetic speeches lack dynamism.

There is some evidence to suggest that that effect is deliberate. Certainly, it seems to be so in the famous verbal duel opposing Beowulf to Unferth (499–606).²⁹ Harris has shown that it is based on the pattern of the *senna*, a type of verbal confrontation found in a dozen Eddic poems, as well as a number of Old Norse prose texts. He provides this definition:

The *senna* (plural *sennur*) is a stylized battle of words; the two principals are usually prevented by some circumstance, at least for the moment, from converting words to blows, and there may be a third figure present who intervenes to conclude the exchange of obloquy. The contents of a

²⁶ Levinson, *Pragmatics*, pp. 303–4. That definition sums up the description offered by Schegloff and Sacks in ‘Opening up Closings’.

²⁷ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, p. 65.

²⁸ See Roulet, ‘De la conversation comme négociation’; Firth, *The Discourse of Negotiation*; Weigand and Dascal, *Negotiation and Power in Dialogic Interaction*; and Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *Le discours en interaction*.

²⁹ For a useful summary of the scholarship on that passage, see Bjork, ‘Digressions and Episodes’.

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senna are threats, insults, challenges, and the appropriate replies; and the insults, at least, tend to be traditional: cowardice, unfree social status, and especially sexual perversions. It is possible also to extract a standard structural framework for the *senna*: there is a Preliminary, comprising an Identification and Characterization, and then a Central Exchange, consisting of either Accusation and Denial, Threat and Counter-threat, or Challenge and Reply or a combination; these structural elements are realized through a more or less regular alternation of speakers, first in question and answer, then comment and reply.³⁰

From that definition, it appears that the structure of the *senna* is based on adjacency pairs ('Accusation and Denial', 'Threat and Counter-threat'),³¹ but not reduced to a single pair of speeches as in *Beowulf*. Other than that, *Beowulf* follows the model quite closely. Unferth's speech starts with a typical preliminary, comparable to one found in *Hárbarðsljóð*, for instance:

Þórr fór ór austrvegi ok kom at sundi eino. Qðrom megom sundzins var
feriokarlinn með scipit. Þórr kallaði:

'Hverr er sá sveinn sveina, er stendr fyr sundit handan?'

Hann svaraði:

'Hverr er sá karl karla, er kallar um váginn?'

... 'Þeygi er, sem þú þríu bú góð eigir;
berbeinn þú stendr, oc hefir brautinga gervi,
þatki, at þú hafir brœcr þínar.' (*Hárbarðsljóð*, § 1–2; 6)³²

Unferð maþelode, Ecglafes bearn,
þe æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga,
onband beadurune (wæs him Beowulfes sið,
modges merefaran, micel æþþunca,
forþon þe he ne uþe þæt ænig oðer man
æfre mærdða þon ma middangeardes
gehedde under heofenum þonne he sylfa):
'Eart þu se Beowulf, se þe wið Breca wunne,
on sidne sæ ymb sund flite,
ðær git for wlence wada cunnedon

³⁰ Harris, 'The *Senna*', p. 66. See also Pizarro, 'Studies on the Function and Context of the *Senna* in Early Germanic Narrative'; and Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative*.

³¹ Harris notes that the second element of the pair may be omitted: 'the actual *sennur* contain more elements than the schema accounts for, omit parts, and manifest various gradations into other genres. Especially frequent are the omissions of a reply element ... Nevertheless, it is obvious that exchange, alternation of (hostile) speakers, is the central structural device', p. 66.

³² Thor travelled from the East and came to a strait. There was a ferryman with a boat on the other side. Thor called out: "Who is that little boy who is on that side of the water?" He answered: "Who is that little old man who is calling from the other shore? ... Yet it does not seem you own three good farms: you stand barelegged and you are dressed like a beggar, you are not even wearing your breeches." Quotations from the *Edda* are from Neckel's edition.

The Form of Direct Speech

ond for dolgilpe on deop wæter
aldrum neþdon? (*Beowulf*, 499–510a)³³

Likewise, the invitation for the other to compare his achievements with those of the speaker is found in both texts:

‘Hins viltu nú geta, er við Hrungnir deildom,
sá inn stórúðgi iotunn, er ór steini var hofuðit á;
þó lét ec hann falla oc fyrir hníga.
Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?’ (*Hárbarðljóð*, § 15)³⁴

‘Hwæt! þu worn fela, wine min Unferð,
beore druncen ymb Breca spræce,
sægdest from his siðe. Soð ic talige,
þæt ic merestrengo maran ahte,
earfeþo on ypum, ðonne ænig oþer man.
... No ic wiht fram þe
swylcra searoniða secgan hyrde,
billa brogan.
... þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,
heafodmægum (*Beowulf*, 530–88a)³⁵

The scene also shares elements with other Eddic texts. Harris notes that the reference to a fratricide is also present in *Helgaqiða Hundingsbana in fyrri* (§ 36) and Clover mentions other parallels, such as the reference to excessive drinking (*Locasenna*, § 47) and the use of a sarcastic concessive clause (*Helgaqiða Hundingsbana in fyrri*, § 48).³⁶ The parallels are numerous and specific enough to accept *Beowulf* as an analogue of the Norse *senna*, even though the typical structure of the *senna* is very different, alternating many speeches (no less than sixty in *Hárbarðljóð*).

Beowulf’s connection with the *senna* tradition is all the more noteworthy as, according to Harris, the *senna* is probably derived from a type of communication act found in authentic conversation, a hypothesis

³³ ‘Unferth spoke formally, the son of Ecglafr, who was seated at the lord of the Scyldings’ feet, he uncovered a war secret (the expedition of Beowulf, a brave sailor, caused him much displeasure because he did not like for any other man to obtain more honours than he did himself under the sky): “Are you the Beowulf who competed with Breca on the wide sea, who challenged him on the water, when you both braved the waves out of pride and for vainglory risked your lives in deep water?”’

³⁴ ‘Now you want to speak of this, when I fought with Hrungnir, the high-minded giant whose head was made out of stone; and yet I made him fall and bow before me. What were you doing at that time, Harbardr?’

³⁵ ‘Listen! My friend Unferth, having drunk beer, you tell many things about Breca, you talk of his expedition. I consider it true that I had more strength on the sea, more hardships on the waves, than any other man ... I have not heard of any such battle, any other armed terror, concerning you ... However you have caused your brothers’ death, close relatives’.

³⁶ Clover, ‘The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode’.

that had already been put forward before by Heusler,³⁷ but which has gained more credibility after the publication of a number of works in sociolinguistics on ritualised verbal confrontations.³⁸ Harris's hypothesis is interesting because it suggests that the 'primitive' state of the *senna* is a highly codified exchange of insults through numerous turns of talk, in imitation of real-life communication acts that were already ritualised to a great extent themselves.³⁹ If so, then the exchange between Beowulf and Unferth must be seen as the product of further stylisation of that traditional pattern.

The Old English poem develops its model considerably. The allusive accusation and its denial are turned into two fully fledged narratives of undeniable virtuosity (especially as regards the second one). At the same time, the structure of the exchange is simplified as the dialogue is replaced with a hieratic diptych, with two speeches facing each other without allowing for any real conversation or interaction. That structure is characteristic of the Old English taste for binary contrast, for oppositions between two irrevocably antagonistic poles.⁴⁰

The implications of that single example for the rest of the corpus should be qualified. The verbal confrontation between Unferth and Beowulf has no equivalent in the extant corpus,⁴¹ just as *Beowulf* itself has no equivalent. As such, it cannot be considered representative. That said, the fact that such a sophisticated scene only exacerbates tendencies present elsewhere (long speeches, reduced number of turns of talk) suggests that such tendencies should also be seen as deliberate stylistic effects and not as signs of inexperience or a lack of alternative options.

³⁷ Heusler, *Die altgermanische dichtung*, pp. 105–8.

³⁸ In particular Labov, 'Rules for Ritual Insults'; Dunders, Leach and Özkök, 'The Strategy of Turkish Boys' Verbal Dueling Rhymes'. Clover contests the validity of the comparison with Labov and shows that the Norse *sennur* often refer to actual events taken seriously, unlike the ritual insults characteristic of sounding ('The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode', p. 458). However, Harris notes that Labov also mentions cases of 'applied sounding', i.e. the use of ritual forms to act in non-ritual situations ('The *Senna*', p. 71).

³⁹ Clover defends the opposite view, taking the Norse pattern to be a later development on an initial 'Claim, Defense, and Counterclaim' pattern. However, her argument rests exclusively on *Beowulf*, which makes it rather weak.

⁴⁰ That taste for contrast is perceptible in some of the syntactic patterns favoured by Old English literature (in particular *ne ... ac ...*) as well as in the imagery (light versus darkness, joy versus sorrow, warmth versus cold, etc.). On that topic, see Leslie, 'Analysis of Stylistic Devices and Effects in Anglo-Saxon Literature', pp. 259–60; Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature*, p. 174; Nelson, *Structures of Opposition in Old English Poems*; Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*; Stepsis and Rand, 'Contrast and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*'; Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, p. 92.

⁴¹ Several passages of Old English poetry show similarities with the *senna* (the exchange between Beowulf and the coast-guard, the discussion between Byrhtnoth and the viking messenger in *The Battle of Maldon* and perhaps also the fragments of *Waldere* and the *Battle of Finnsburh*) but none of them is as elaborate as the one discussed here. See Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative*, p. 7; Clover, 'The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode', p. 447.

The Form of Direct Speech

In Old English poetry, not only are verbal exchanges typically reduced to few turns of talk, but many speeches are not part of exchanges at all. Some are completely isolated, while others contribute to other types of organisation. That phenomenon is not marginal. If in *Juliana* and *Guthlac A* (and to a lesser extent *Andreas*), most speeches contribute to exchanges, in *Beowulf*, *Genesis A* and *B* and *Elene*, only about half of the speeches do so, while in *Christ and Satan* they are clearly a minority.

Isolated Speeches

Isolated speeches represent about one-quarter of the main corpus examined here (75 out of 289 speeches). They can be found in translations as well as in original texts and they come in all shapes and sizes. Certain types are especially common, however, and deserve notice. Public speeches are well represented. In *Beowulf*, the lack of any possible answer to such speeches is emphasised on several occasions. Beowulf lies down immediately after his oath to fight Grendel barehanded (677–87) and dives into the mere without waiting for an answer after swearing to fight with Hrunting (1474–91).⁴² Similarly, Wealhtheow goes back to her seat just after her speech to Hrothgar (1175–87). In such a set-up, the addressee simply cannot respond, whether verbally or non-verbally. The independent and autonomous nature of the speech is thus highlighted: it constitutes an extraordinary speech event,⁴³ obeying rules quite distinct from those of ordinary communication. That distanciation from ‘normal speech’ contributes to the perception that such speeches and their speakers have a particularly elevated status. One may also wonder whether those extraordinary speeches do not interest the poet – rather like the tale of the *scop* about Hildeburh (1063–160a) – more because they help to construct the atmosphere of an authentic Germanic court, for which the poet might feel nostalgic, than because the communication act they represent is crucial to the narrative. Those speeches (and their immediate surroundings) are indeed saturated with terms evoking heroic culture, with references to sumptuous gifts, glory in battle and drinks shared among warriors. To some extent, they function as icons of heroic culture, which may explain why they are represented as isolated set pieces.

⁴² The fact is even made explicit: *æfter þam wordum Wedergeata leod / efste mid elne, nalas ondsware / bidan wolde*, ‘according to those words, the prince of the Geats hastened with courage, he had no intention to wait for an answer’ (1492–4a). On the translation of *æfter þam wordum*, see Chapter 1, ‘Marking: After the Speech’.

⁴³ A speech event is, roughly speaking, an (inter)action involving speech. It may be constituted of many speech acts (e.g. a conversation, a debate) or just one (e.g. a solitary prayer). The concept comes from Hymes, ‘Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life’.

In hagiographic literature, public isolated speeches often correspond to didactic lessons. Again, no answer is expected. It is ostensibly the case for Juliana's last words, followed hard upon by her death (*ðā hyre sawl wearð / alæded of lice to þam langan gefean / þurh sweordslege*, 'Then her soul was taken from her body to lasting bliss by a sword', 669b–670a), but the same is true elsewhere.⁴⁴ Even though the speech is ostensibly addressed to a specific audience (*leof weorud*, 'dear crowd', 647a), little attention is devoted to that audience or to their relationship with the saint. Juliana's message is universal as it touches on 'all the nations of men and all the race of angels' (*werþeode / ond eal engla cynn*, 643b–644a) and some of her teachings are phrased impersonally (645b–646, 650b–652a). Like other public isolated speeches, this lesson is also something of a bravura piece. It is seven times as long as the original. It expresses fewer ideas but develops them more fully and enriches the imagery, adding a reference to the patristic parable of the house buffeted by storms.⁴⁵ It is clear that the supposed interaction between Juliana and the crowd is only a pretext for a speech designed to teach and move the readers and listeners of the poem, who are the true audience targeted.

Another important type of isolated speech corresponds to the expression of thoughts and feelings.⁴⁶ As Marnette points out,⁴⁷ that type of speech is the only way to represent thoughts in medieval literary genres that are particularly close to an oral tradition. Indeed, in a modern, written text, it is perfectly acceptable to use the form of Direct Speech to represent the thoughts of a character as if they were a sort of interior monologue. On the other hand, in a genre defined by orality, something is spoken or it is not, but it cannot be represented both as a speech and as something interior at the same time. As a consequence, thoughts may be evoked or described, but they cannot be represented directly in such texts unless they are represented as 'real' speeches, i.e. as words uttered aloud. The fact that such speeches are really thoughts in disguise explains why they do not call for an answer.

Another particular case requires mentioning: the use of relatively brief speeches embedded into another speech. Quite often, such

⁴⁴ See *Andreas*, 676–91 (speech within a speech by a priest) and 744–60 (testimony of the statue); and *Guthlac A*, 361–8 (words supposedly spoken by the saint).

⁴⁵ See Bleeth, 'Juliana, 647–52'; Doubleday, 'The Allegory of the Soul as Fortress in Old English Poetry'.

⁴⁶ *Beowulf*, 2247–66 (lament of the last survivor); *Andreas*, 1558–68 (a member of the crowd regrets mistreating the saint) and 1717–22 (choral speech of the crowd when Andreas leaves); *Elene*, 1120–4 (the assembled people declare their faith); *Juliana*, 632–4 (lament of the demon); *Genesis A*, 1093–103 (Lamek confesses killing Cain), 1111b–1116 (Adam's joy when Seth is born) and 1255–62 (God's anger against the men who married descendants of Cain); *Genesis B*, 278–91 (Lucifer's rebellion); *Christ and Satan*, 228–78 and 385–97 (laments of the demons and / or Satan), and 656–8 (praises of the martyrs).

⁴⁷ Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*, p. 172.

speeches do not correspond to true Represented Speech, but rather to something close to a quotation, as in the following examples:⁴⁸

recordare domine magister bone, tunc quando in cruce fuisti clamabas
ad patrem, deus deus meus quare me dereliquisti? (*recensio casanatensis*,
§ 28)⁴⁹

ða ðu of gealgan, god lifigende,
fyrnweorca frea, to fæder cleopodest,
cininga wuldor, ond cwæde ðus:
'Ic ðe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
lifes leohtfruma, hwæt forlætest ðu me?' (*Andreas*, 1409–13)⁵⁰

ut id quod dictum est per Prophetam impleatur, Et erit in illo die quod
est in freno equi sanctum Domini vocabitur. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*,
§ 14)⁵¹

Be ðam se witga sang,
snottor searupancum, (sefa deop gewod,
wisdomes gewitt), he þæt word gecwæð:
'Cup þæt gewyrðeð þæt þæs cyninges sceal
mearh under modegum midlum geweorðod,
bridelshringum. Bið þæt beacen gode
halig nemned, ond se hwæteadig,
wigge weorðod, se þæt wicg byrð.' (*Elene*, 1188b–1195)⁵²

The first case is rather ambiguous, as *Andreas* is not just interested in the words themselves but also in the situation that prompted them.

⁴⁸ See also *Andreas*, 332–9 (Christ's words quoted by *Andreas* to the pilot); and *Elene*, 339–41 (quotation from Moses), 345–9 (quotation from David), 353–63 (from Isaiah) and 750–3a (song of the cherubim evoked by Judas).

⁴⁹ 'Remember, my good lord and master, when you were on the Cross and you called to your father: "God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"' cf. Matt. XXVII.46 (*et circa horam nonam clamavit Iesus voce magna dicens Heli Heli lema sabacthani hoc est Deus meus Deus meus ut quid dereliquisti me*, 'And towards the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a strong voice saying "Heli Heli lema sabacthani", that is to say "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"') and Mark XV.34 (*et hora nona exclamavit Iesus voce magna dicens Heloi Heloi lama sabacthani quod est interpretatum Deus meus Deus meus ut quid dereliquisti me*, 'and at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a strong voice saying "Heloi Heloi lama sabacthani", which is translated as "My God, my God, but why have you forsaken me?"').

⁵⁰ 'Then from the Cross, living god, lord of the creation, you called your father, glory of kings, and you said thus: "I want, father of the angels, to ask you, origin of light and life, why have you forsaken me?"'

⁵¹ 'When what the prophet said will come true: "And on that day, what is in the horse's bit will be called saint before God."' Cf. Zech. XIV.20 (*in die illo erit quod super frenum equi est sanctum Domino et erunt lebetes in domo Domini quasi fialae coram altari*, 'In that day there will be "saint before God" on the horses' bits and the pots in the lord's house will be as cups before an altar').

⁵² 'About that the prophet sang, wise and talented (his understanding was deep, the penetration of his wisdom), he said those words: "It will be known that the horse of the king will be honoured among the braves for its bit and bridle. That emblem will be called saint before God and the one successful in combat, carried by that steed, will gain honour in battle."'

And yet the words represented by Andreas have been quoted so many times in so many contexts that it is hard not to hear them as a quotation from the gospels.

As for the second instance, it is a very clear-cut case of quotation from the Bible. The speaker is barely identified, no reference is made to the original context in which the words were spoken and they are valued most of all for themselves and for the authority they carry. This is much closer to a *sententia* than to Represented Speech. Such instances are quite rare in the corpus (except in *Elene*) and they are always already a feature of the Latin source. On the other hand, Old English poets show no unease with those quotations: they do not demote them to Indirect Speech, delete them or try to transform them into genuine representations. As such, it seems that the convention is borrowed from the Latin but that it does not go against established Old English poetic norms.

The examples of isolated speeches considered here teach us two important things. First of all, it is not always easy to distinguish what is typical of Old English poetics from what is typical of Latin prose or of a specific literary genre, such as the hagiographic tradition. Both Latin and Old English cultures are pre-modern and both may share a number of features that are alien to modern texts. Second, those examples show that Old English poets may use Direct Speech to represent many other things than communication acts and they are sometimes more interested in what Direct Speech allows them to impart to their audience than in the interactions of characters.

Other Groups of Speeches

Speeches need not be either isolated or part of true exchanges. They may also contribute to other structures, namely series of speeches and 'pseudo-exchanges'.⁵³ Those phenomena only concern a relatively small number of speeches (30 and 15 respectively out of the 289 considered here), but they are instructive. The term 'series' is used here to designate a group of several speeches following each other closely, spoken by the same character in the same situation. It is sometimes difficult to make a distinction between several isolated speeches and a true series, so the figures provided here should be accepted with a degree of caution.

Series may be found in original Old English poems or in translations from the Latin and their sources, but not used in the same way. In the Latin sources, series correspond either to a form of interaction in which one of the turns of talk is replaced by a non-verbal act (e.g.

⁵³ They may also form an exchange with indirect or narrated speeches, though that is relatively rare (only 7 speeches out of 289).

when Judas asks God for a sign, is answered by a plume of smoke and thanks him, *Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 9–10; *Elene*, 725–826) or to a true series developing parallel patterns. In that second case, each speech in the series is directed to a new addressee: a smaller and smaller crowd of wise men (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 4–5; *Elene*, 288–395); the serpent, Adam and Eve (Gen. III.14–17; *Genesis A*, 906–38) or Abraham and his wife, though in that case the parallel pattern is hardly obvious in the source (Gen. XV.16; *Genesis A*, 2723–35).

Both Cynewulf and the *Genesis A* poet reproduce and even develop the parallel patterns present in the Latin, which show that they were aware of their expressive potential. See for example the treatment of Gen. III.14 and III.17:

et ait Dominus Deus ad serpentem *quia fecisti hoc maledictus es inter omnia animantia et bestias terrae super pectus tuum gradieris et terram comedes cunctis diebus vitae tuae ...*

ad Adam vero dixit *quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae et comedisti de ligno ex quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes maledicta terra in opere tuo in laboribus comedes eam cunctis diebus vitae tuae* [my italics] (Gen. III.14; 17)⁵⁴

‘*Pu scealt wideferhð werig þinum
breostum bearm tredan bradre eorðan,
faran feðeleas, þenden þe feorh wunað,
gast on innan. Þu scealt greot etan
þine lifdagas. Swa þu laðlice
wrohte onstealdest ... Nu þu wast and canst,
lað leodsceaða, hu þu lifian scealt.*’
... ‘*Pu scealt oðerne eðel secean,
wynleasran wic, and on wræc hweorfan
nacod niedwædla, neorxnawanges
dugeðum bedæled; þe is gedal witod
lices and sawle. Hwæt, þu laðlice
wrohte onstealdest; forþon þu winnan scealt
and on eorðan þe þine andlifne
selfa geræcan, wegan swatig hleor,
þinne hlaf etan, þenden þu her leofast
... forþon þu sweltan scealt.*’ [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 906–38)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ ‘And the lord God told the snake: “Because you did this, you are *damned* among all the animals and the beasts on earth. You will go on your belly and *you will eat dirt all the days of your life ...*” And to Adam he said: “Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, the earth is *damned* by your deed. You will eat from it with difficulty *all the days of your life*”’.

⁵⁵ “‘You shall always, exhausted, tread the bosom of the earth on your breast, *as long as life inhabits you, the soul in you. You shall eat dirt in the days of your life. Thus, hatefully, you committed a crime ...* Now you know and experience, hateful enemy of men, how *you shall live*” ... “You shall seek another homeland, a dwelling deprived of joy, and go in exile, naked and in need, without the benefits of Paradise; the separation of soul from the body

The poet retains verbatim repetitions (in italics), but also develops the theme of exile in both passages,⁵⁶ thus reinforcing the parallel. That pattern emphasises the fact that punishment awaits all sinners. Furthermore, it takes the word of God away from ordinary speech and endows it with additional power: repetitions (especially threefold) are characteristic of sacred and magical discourses, as can be confirmed by the few extant Old English charms and prayers.

Christ and Satan and *Beowulf* use series of speeches in a rather different way.⁵⁷ In those two poems, series of speeches are not characterised by parallel patterns and they are often spoken not only by the same character but also to the same audience, so that the series resembles a kind of overlong speech interspersed with inquit. It seems that poets use such series to make one part of the character's speech stand out more, as in this extract from *Christ and Satan*:⁵⁸

Ful oft wuldres sweg
brohton to bearme bearn hælendes,
þær we ymb hine utan ealle hofan,
leomu ymb leofne, lofsonga word,
drihtne sædon. Nu ic eom dædum fah,
gewundod mid wommum; sceal nu þysne wites clom
beoran beornende in bæce minum,
hat on helle, hyhtwillan leas.
Þa gyt feola cwiððe firna herde,
atol æglæca, ut of helle,
witum werig. Word spearcum fleah
attre gelicost, þonne he ut þorhðraf:
'Eala drihtenes þrym! Eala duguða helm!
Eala meotodes miht! Eala middaneard!
Eala dæg leohta! Eala dream godes!
Eala engla þreat! Eala upheofen!
Eala þæt ic eam ealles leas ecan dreames,
þæt ic mid handum ne mæg heofon geræcan,
ne mid eagam ne mot up locian,

is unavoidable for you. Listen! *Hatefully, you committed a crime*, that is why *you shall* work and earn your living from the earth yourself, have your face covered with sweat and eat your bread *while you live here* ... and thus *you shall* die."

⁵⁶ Characteristic elements present here include the move in or towards exile, the idea of seeking something, of turning from something and of privation and sorrow. See Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry'.

⁵⁷ Admittedly, *Christ and Satan* (616–27) represents two speeches directed at two different addressees (saved souls and damned souls), but the obvious parallel between the two situations is not emphasised stylistically.

⁵⁸ Other instances include *Christ and Satan*, 81–188 (Satan's laments), 408–40 (Eve's prayer to Jesus); *Beowulf*, 2155–62 (Beowulf speaks again after his exchange with Hygelac), 2426–537 (Beowulf to his companions before fighting the dragon), 2633–68 (Wiglaf to Beowulf's companions and Beowulf himself), 2729–816 (Beowulf's last words to Wiglaf) and 3077–119 (Wiglaf to the troop). See also *Andreas*, 717–34 (Jesus describes the pictures on the wall), which is apparently not treated in quite the same way as in the source.

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ne huru mid earum ne sceal æfre geheran
þære byrhtestan beman stefne! (*Christ and Satan*, 151b–171)⁵⁹

No change of topic or situation justifies the brief interruption of the speech by a new inquit. On the other hand, the contrast between past joy and present sorrow gains prominence from its final position while the cries of despair are all the more striking for their isolation, not to mention the image used to refer to them in the inquit, which characterises them as bursts of satanic malevolence, as different as can be from ordinary speech.⁶⁰

That reintroduction of speech as speech in the middle of a single act of communication is not unlike the use of italics or additional quotation marks in a modern text in order to reactivate the notion of Reported Speech.⁶¹ In Old English poetry, one may also mention the use of *verbum dicendi* in the first person in the middle of a speech,⁶² which seems to serve a similar purpose:

Ic sceal forð sprecan
gen ymbe Grendel, þæt ðu geare cunne,
sinces brytta, to hwan syððan wearð
hondræs hæleða. (*Beowulf*, 2069b–2072a)⁶³

That extract intervenes after a relatively long narrative (concerning the truce between the Danes and the Heathobards) and before *Beowulf* resumes the story of his fight against Grendel. The addition of such a transition – whether a true inquit or a *verbum dicendi* in the first person – clarifies the structure of very long speeches. It avoids the risks of confusion that may arise in extremely long speeches, especially in the case of an oral performance, when the audience might easily forget who is speaking. It also allows the poet to better delineate different units

⁵⁹ “Very often we brought the sound of glory to the saviour son’s lap, there, all around him, with arms surrounding the beloved one, we all sang words of praise, addressed them to the lord. Now I am guilty because of my deeds, wounded because of my sins; now I shall endure that chain of torment which burns my back, the heat of hell, without any hope.” Then the horrible monster said many other things still from hell, exhausted with torments. His words flew with sparks, very like poison, when he cried out: “Alas for the glory of the lord! Alas for the protector of multitudes! Alas for the power of the creator! Alas for the earth! Alas for the day full of light! Alas for divine joy! Alas for the company of angels! Alas for the heavens above! Alas for I am deprived of eternal joy, I cannot reach for the sky with my hands, nor can I see up there with my eyes, nor hear with my ears the sound of the clearest trumpet!”

⁶⁰ On that image see Keenan, ‘Satan Speaks in Sparks’.

⁶¹ In modern texts, the device is especially used to convey the idea that certain words were pronounced exactly in those terms. See Combettes, ‘Énoncé, énonciation et discours rapporté’, p. 101.

⁶² Such *verba dicendi* may also be used at the very beginning of a speech, to reinforce the inquit.

⁶³ ‘I have to continue speaking about Grendel so that you may know exactly, treasure-giver, what was the result of the confrontation of warriors.’

in the speech: two different narratives, as in the extract from *Beowulf* just quoted, but also different types of speech acts (narration, request, order, etc.). Once again, one notes the taste of Old English poets for a device allowing them to delineate discrete blocks to the apparent detriment of fluidity.

One last type of speech organisation requires consideration: the use of 'pseudo-exchanges', i.e. when someone reacts to an initial speech with a speech of their own but without being the addressee of the initial speech or without addressing the initial speaker. The phenomenon is relatively marginal as most instances are found in the same poem: *Andreas*.⁶⁴ Some instances are already present in the *Praxeis Andreou* and cannot be ascribed to the poet. Thus the curious passage (537–56, § 9) in which Andreas answers the pilot (who is actually Jesus in disguise) with a prayer to God, which in turn is answered (*oncwæð*) by the pilot is already present in the Greek text. The aim of the Greek author seems to have been to draw attention to the true identity of the pilot by playing on the repetition of the word 'Jesus' to designate both the addressee of a prayer supposedly *in absentia* and the pilot by Andreas's side. Interestingly enough, the *recensio casanatensis* avoids the confusion by having Andreas address the pilot rather than God. The Old English poet also tried to clarify matters by specifying that God answers from the boat (*of ceole*) and not from heaven, but retains the confusion on the identity of the addressee by keeping the pseudo-exchange and referring to the pilot as God (*cyninga wuldor*, 'glory of kings' and *fruma ond ende*, 'the origin and the end').

On another occasion (397–414) the Old English poet actually creates a pseudo-exchange, which did not exist in the source, by deleting a turn of talk: in the *Praxeis Andreou* and the *recensio casanatensis* (§ 7), Andreas relays the pilot's offer to let his companions disembark and they answer him, whereas in the Old English poem the companions directly answer the pilot's suggestion to Andreas. This type of structure is too rare and too narrowly distributed to be considered typical of Old English poetry, but it seems to confirm a relative lack of concern of Old English poets for the representation of a credible interaction.

To sum up, the features most characteristic of speech organisation in Old English poetry are as follows: a tendency to diminish the number

⁶⁴ *Andreas*, 405–14 (Andreas's companions tell him they will not leave him after the pilot raised the issue), 540–54 (Andreas calls out to God in the middle of his exchange with the pilot), 1164–200 (rather confused exchange between the wise men from Mermedonia, the devil and Andreas), 1281–301 (the devil reacts to a prayer of Andreas to God) and 1602–12 (Andreas answers the crowd who spoke without addressing anyone in particular. See also *Guthlac A*, 698–721 (Bartholomew reacts to the exchange between Guthlac and the demons) and *Genesis A*, 2783b–2803 (God's order to Abraham responds to Sarah's request to her husband).

of turns of talk but to develop them fully; to create or amplify effects of contrast and opposition (often binary) as well as parallel patterns; and to isolate clearly delineated units of texts. Those tendencies are perfectly in keeping with Old English poetics more generally. See, for example, Doubleday's analysis of the 'principle of contrast' in *Judith*:

These three major changes ... result, I think from a single principle. That principle is one of contrast. The main characters are reduced to two, and those two are made polar opposites. Judith's character is remade on the model of the saint's lives; Holofernes is made diabolical. The introduction of a battle can best be explained as an artistically necessary result of the operation of this principle. If there is a fundamental opposition between Judith and Holofernes and between Judith's people and Holofernes', then the conflict between the two seems to follow inevitably.⁶⁵

Old English poetry's taste for autonomous, clearly delineated units is also well attested: see for example Pasternack's analysis of boundary markers in Old English poetry or Bartlett's concept of 'decorative insets'.⁶⁶ In conclusion, one may say that the rules governing the structure of Direct Speech in Old English poetry are not radically different from those governing the structure of narratives. Additionally, it seems that Old English poets are not struggling against poetic constraints to imitate real-life conversations but that they are, on the contrary, keen to promote effects that take speeches away from ordinariness.

Marking

The initial *inquit* has received more critical attention than any other marker of Direct Speech in Old English poetry.⁶⁷ The attention is legitimate as the device is both rich and complex, but it should not lead us to forget other markers: explicit textual markers signalling the end (rather than the beginning) of a speech, implicit textual and metrical markers signalling both limits of a speech unit and non-textual markers (punctuation, layout). All those elements are considered here.

⁶⁵ Doubleday, 'The Principle of Contrast in *Judith*', p. 438.

⁶⁶ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, especially pp. 120–46; Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 72–89. Though Bartlett uses the word 'decorative', she admits that such insets may serve different functions, including didactic.

⁶⁷ See in particular Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 245–84; Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', pp. 262–5; and Stévanovitch, '*Beowulf* *mapelode*, *Bearn Eþeowes*'.

The Initial Inquit

The Old English initial inquit is remarkable in that it is never dispensed with, which is quite unusual. In Latin prose, the inquit is often reduced or altogether absent, and the audience must rely on context to guess the identity of the speaker.⁶⁸ Eddic poems often do without it, though in numerous cases the manuscripts include short textual markers in prose (almost always on the pattern Name + *kvað*, 'said') to clarify matters.⁶⁹ As for Old Saxon poems, they often prefer a short interpolated inquit to the initial one:⁷⁰

endi hiet sia ina haldan uuel,
minneon sia an is *muode*: 'Ni uuis thu' quathie, 'Mariun uureth,
thiornun thinero [my italics] (*Heliand*, 317b–319a)⁷¹

The inquit *quathie* ('he said') carries no stress,⁷² which makes it all the more discreet and allows for a fluid transition between the two turns of talk. The use of such an interpolated inquit is not impossible in Old English poetry, but it is incredibly rare. There is one instance in the *Battle of Finnsburh* (24a), which Richman finds suspicious enough to doubt its authenticity,⁷³ and there is another in *Genesis B* (278a), which is almost certainly literally translated from the Old Saxon source.

The Old Saxon *Heliand*, to smooth its transitions from one speech to another, also relies on the device of 'slipping':

⁶⁸ Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', p. 149.

⁶⁹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 245. While Eddic verse was probably transmitted orally in one form or another for a time, it is likely that the prose elements were added in the course of written transmission. The presence of identical prose elements in the two main manuscripts ('Codex Regius', Reykjavik, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, GKS 2365 and 'Codex Arnamagnæan', Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute, 748) implies that they were inserted in an earlier copy. In other words, the poems were presumably transmitted (orally) without the prose inquit and later with them. See Kellogg, 'Literacy and Orality in the Poetic Edda', pp. 91–2 and Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, pp. 203–33. Gunnell also notes cases where a verse inquit has likely been added at a later stage in the transmission (as evidenced by the fact the inquit precedes an already regular eight-line stanza), p. 207.

⁷⁰ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 247.

⁷¹ 'And he commanded to take good care of her, to love her in his heart: "Do not be", he said, "angry against Mary, your wife"'. Quotations from *Heliand* are taken from Sievers's edition of London, British Library, Cotton Caligula A. VII.

⁷² See the italics on the four stressed syllables of that verse. Russom notes that, in a significant number of instances (*Heliand*, 397, 825, 1597, 2419, 2432, 3052, 3057, 3203, 3948, 4516, 4638 and 4973), one manuscript includes the inquit while another does not. He suggests that such inquit may very well have been added by scribes feeling 'a need to add discourse markers appropriate to their colder medium' (*Beowulf and Old Germanic Metre*, p. 138). If he is right, then the situation in Old Saxon is quite similar to that in Old Norse, even though in one case the scribal additions are included in the verse and in the other they are not.

⁷³ Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', p. 239.

Sia quathun that it uuari uueroldkesures
fan Rumuburg 'thes the allas thieses rikes habið
giuuald an thesaro uueroldi.' (*Heliand*, 3827–29a)⁷⁴

The transition from narration to Direct Speech is only marked implicitly through the use of the present tense and the proximal deictic marker *thes* (Old English *þes* and Present-Day English *this*). Such transitions are relatively common in Old Saxon,⁷⁵ but again quite rare in Old English.⁷⁶ Regarding later, rhymed Germanic poetry, Heusler also notes the use of more varied devices, on the model of Latin poetry.⁷⁷ Old English poetry is apparently the only early Germanic tradition that systematically uses an initial inquit.

That initial inquit always specifies at least the identity of the speaker and quite often that of the addressee.⁷⁸ Its size may vary significantly. Again, this is peculiar to Old English: in Eddic poetry, the initial inquit is almost systematically one or two line(s) long.⁷⁹ In Old English poems, one-line and two-line inquit are also most common (respectively 76 and 68 instances in a corpus of 282 inquit, i.e. the two conjoined make up about 50 per cent of all instances), but they are by no means without competition. A half-line (17 instances), a line and a half (36), two lines and a half (24) or three lines (22) are all common options, while inquit longer than three lines are not rare (39 instances).⁸⁰ On the other hand, it is relatively uncommon for an inquit to end at the caesura, except in *Genesis B* (4 instances out of 11) and in *Elene* (8 out of 40).⁸¹ The presence of such inquit in *Genesis B* may easily be explained by the Old Saxon influence as the phenomenon is more common in that corpus.⁸² *Elene* is a rather more intriguing case: it might be another instance of Cynewulf's experimentation with conventions in that poem.

⁷⁴ 'They said it was [the image] of the world's emperor, from the fortress of Rome "for he has power over all the kingdom in this world."'

⁷⁵ Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', pp. 93–121. For the notion of 'slipping', Richman relies on Schuelke, "'Slipping" in Indirect Discourse'.

⁷⁶ Only two instances in the corpus examined here: *Elene* (162b–165) and *Christ and Satan* (672).

⁷⁷ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 248.

⁷⁸ Richman shows that when the identity of the speaker is not specified in a Latin source, the Old English translator supplies the information 90% of the time (whether he works in verse or in prose). The same is true for the identity of the addressee, though to a lesser extent (21% of the time in prose and 55% in verse): see 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', pp. 149–54.

⁷⁹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 253: he finds 60 one-line inquit, 20 two-line inquit and 8 of variable lengths (from a half-line to four lines).

⁸⁰ The poems of the corpus are not completely uniform in that respect, of course, but it is not possible to identify several distinct models either.

⁸¹ There are also 3 instances out of 19 in *Christ and Satan*; 6 out of 45 in *Beowulf*; 3 out of 29 in *Juliana*; 2 out of 68 in *Andreas*; and 1 out of 62 in *Genesis A*.

⁸² Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 238.

The figures presented above should be treated with caution. In some cases, especially when the inquit is quite long, the border between narrative and inquit may be quite blurred and it becomes difficult to determine where the inquit starts exactly. In the extract below from *Beowulf*, for example, the inquit is developed into a sort of envelope pattern,⁸³ with two references to the upcoming speech framing a substantial digression on the sword and its origins:

Hroðgar maðelode, hylt sceawode,
ealde lafe, on ðæm wæs or writen
fyrngewinnes, syðþan flod ofsloh,
gifen geotende, giganta cyn
(frecne geferdon); þæt wæs fremde þeod
ecean dryhtne; him þæs endelea
þurh wæteres wylm waldend sealde.
Swa wæs on ðæm scennum sciran goldes
þurh runstafas rihte gemearcod,
geseted ond gesæd hwam þæt sweord geworht,
irena cyst, ærest wære,
wreopenhilt ond wyrmfah. Ða se wisa spræc
sunu Healfdenes (swigedon ealle) (*Beowulf*, 1687–99)⁸⁴

The whole passage has been treated as an inquit here because the *verbum dicendi* at line 1687a is unmistakable, but it is certain that the function of the passage goes much beyond that of a simple inquit so that it would not be illegitimate to have it start line at 1698b (*Ða se wisa spræc ...*).

The same difficulty occurs when Narrated Speech segues into Direct Speech:

Beata autem Helena, repleta Dei fide, & intelligens Scripturas per vetus & novum Testamentum, instructa & repleta Spiritua sancto, iterum cœpit studiose requirere qui in cruce confixi fuerant clavi, in quibus impii Judæi Salvatorem crucifixerunt & convocans Judam, qui cognominatus est Cyriacus, dixit ei (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 12)⁸⁵

⁸³ On that rhetorical device, see Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 9–29.

⁸⁴ 'Hrothgar spoke formally; he observed the hilt, the old relic, on which was written the origin of an ancient fight. Later, the flood, an overflowing ocean, destroyed the race of giants (they had behaved very badly); they were a people alien to the eternal lord; because of that their master gave them final retribution, with a surge of water. On the plates of shining gold was also duly written in runes, spelled out and declared, for whom the sword had originally been made, the excellent blade, ornamented with metal threads and serpentine patterns. Then the wise man spoke, the son of Healfdene (all were silent)'.

⁸⁵ 'Then the blessed Helen, filled with faith in God, understanding Scriptures through the Old and the New Testament, instructed and filled with the Holy Ghost, started anew to look eagerly for the nails which had been planted in the Cross and with which impious Jews had crucified the saviour, and she summoned Judas, now called Cyriacus, to tell him'.

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Be ðam frignan ongan
cristenra cwen, Cyriacus bæd
þæt hire þa gina gastes mihtum
ymb wundorwyrð willan gefylde,
onwriga wuldorgifum, ond þæt word acwæð
to þam bisceope, bald reordode (*Elene*, 1067b–1072)⁸⁶

In the Latin source, Helen's investigation is told as a narrative until the verbs *convocans* and *dixit* are used to introduce Direct Speech. It is true that *requirere* may be translated as 'ask for' rather than 'look for', but the notion of speech is at best implicit. In the Old English poem, on the other hand, the investigation is first represented as Narrated Speech – the use of *bæd* in particular is unmistakable – and then as Direct Speech. The content makes it clear that there are not two speeches but that the same speech is represented twice. As such, the two elements cannot be considered fully autonomous. To be sure, the information provided as Narrated Speech is unusually detailed and goes much beyond the mere identification of the speaker, but it is not radically different from that found in many inquires of Old English poetry.

That tendency to anticipate the content of the speech in its introduction, to the point that the speech itself becomes largely redundant (in terms of the information provided), is not so uncommon in Old English poetry and it undoubtedly contributes to the impression that Direct Speech does not help the narrative to move forward but rather hinders it.⁸⁷ Those impossibly long inquires are also somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the longer the inquire, the more Direct Speech is isolated from the narrative. On the other hand, inquires are elaborated to such an extent that they become almost indistinguishable from the narrative themselves.

One could legitimately expect inquires to be heavily formulaic: as Lord has shown,⁸⁸ the most stable formulas are those that express common ideas – and what is more common than a character speaking? In fact, several very standard formulas do exist, but in that case, as elsewhere in Old English poetry, the poet is not constrained by unchangeable patterns: he is free not to use the standard formulas or to use them in a non-standard way.

⁸⁶ 'About that the queen of Christians started to enquire, she asked Cyriacus to use his spiritual powers to achieve her desire once again concerning their miraculous fate, to use his glorious gifts to reveal it, and she spoke those words to the bishop, exclaimed bravely'.

⁸⁷ The same device is used several times to represent Satan's speeches in *Christ and Satan* and *Genesis B*, as well as Guthlac's in *Guthlac A*, and it is not always easy to discriminate whether the Narrated Speech corresponds to another speech act or merely anticipates the content of the speech represented directly.

⁸⁸ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, p. 34. Speech marking is also the very first case studied by Parry in his article entitled 'Whole Formulaic Verses in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Song', pp. 183–8.

The most studied formulaic inquit is undoubtedly the *maþelode* formula in *Beowulf*,⁸⁹ typically found in the form X *maþelode bearn* Ys, though the second half-line tolerates some variation: it usually provides further information on the speaker but may refer to any other aspect of the situation of utterance. There are no less than twenty-five instances of *maþelode* inquit in *Beowulf* (out of forty-five speeches), eleven of which follow the pattern exactly. Even more striking, evidence from Old Saxon and Old High German suggests that the formula might be very ancient:

Zacharias thuo gimalda endi uuid selþan sprak
drohtines engil, endi im thero dadio bigan
uundron thero uuordo (*Heliand*, 139–41a)⁹⁰

Hadubrant gimahalta, Hiltibrantes sunu (*Hildebrandslied*, 36)⁹¹

This is assuredly an interesting case, but it is quite atypical of the extant corpus. Outside *Beowulf*, there is no instance of the full formula (with a reference to filiation), and there are relatively few instances of *maþelode*.⁹² More importantly, no other poem is thus dominated by one formula.

Not that poets are particularly keen to avoid repetition: they are perfectly happy to reuse the same formula several times, even in close proximity.⁹³ Some formulas are very common, especially those associating *word* and *cweðan* or its compounds and those introducing an answer:

- (ond / þa) (he) (gen / þus) worde/-um cwæð (eighteen instances);⁹⁴
- ond / he þæt word ge-/acwæð (twenty instances);⁹⁵

⁸⁹ See Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 260–2; Cook, 'The Beowulfian *Maþelode*'; Stévanovitch, 'Beowulf *maþelode*, *Bearn Ecgþeowes*'; and McConchie, 'The Use of the Verb *maþelian* in *Beowulf*'.

⁹⁰ 'Zacharias then spoke formally and talked with the angel of the lord in person, and expressed his amazement at his acts and deeds'.

⁹¹ 'Hadubrand spoke formally, the son of Hildebrand'. Quotations from *Hildebrandslied* are taken from Braune's textbook, pp. 76–77.

⁹² Thirteen in the corpus examined here, most of which (nine) are found in *Elene*. The verb is also used in *The Battle of Maldon* (42, 309) and *Waldere B* (11).

⁹³ In *Beowulf*, the exact same formula (*Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*) is repeated several times in a row (529 and 631; 1383, 1473 and 1651). Elsewhere, repetitions are more inconspicuous but they do occur: the same formula, adapted for different speakers, is used twice in a row in *Genesis A* (872, *Him ða ædre god andswarede*, 'Then God answered him at once'; 882, *Him þa Adam eft andswarode*, 'Then Adam answered him back'); while the formula *Him ða Andreas agef ondsware* ('Then Andreas gave him an answer') is used several times in the same exchange in *Andreas* (572 and 617, and again, but with small variations, 628 and 643).

⁹⁴ *Andreas* (62b, 173b, 354b, 539b, 716b, 727a, 743b, 850b, 913a, 1206a, 1280b, 1450a); *Genesis A* (195b, 905b and 1254b); *Genesis B* (355b); *Christ and Satan* (407b); and *Elene* (338a). When the formula occurs in the first half-line, the second is usually occupied by a noun phrase referring to the speaker.

⁹⁵ *Andreas* (896a, 1172b, 1299b, 1361b, 1400b, 1663a); *Elene* (338a, 344a, 440b, 938a, 1071b, 1190b); *Juliana* (45a, 143b, 631b, 640b); *Beowulf* (654b, 2046b); *Genesis A* (1110b); and, with

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– *Him (þa)/þa him andswarode X* or *Him þa (ædre) X andswarode* (thirty-one instances);⁹⁶

– *Him ða / Edre him X agef ondsware* (twenty instances).⁹⁷

There are also several other relatively well-attested formulas, based on the *verba dicendi spreca*n, *frignan*, *secan* and *reordian*, but all taken together the most common formulas only make up for about half of the inquit examined. Furthermore, standard formulas never exceed one line in length, while inquit may be much longer: several elements may be added before or after a standard formula, but it may also be ‘diluted’ through the interpolation of various elements not required by the pattern. In other words, poets are not compelled to use very long formulaic inquit, but they are free to build on the relatively short patterns available to them.

It is not impossible – though impossible to prove – that a small number of formulas (including that based on *maðelian / gimahlian / gimahalen*) once constituted the dominant mode of speech introduction in Germanic poetry. If so, then it would seem that Old Saxon poetry evolved towards greater flexibility (with interpolated inquit and a shortened *gimahlian* formula) while, on the contrary, Old English poetry went for greater elaboration, amplifying and diluting standard formulas to turn them into impressive barriers between speech and narrative.

The reasons for that preference are worth examining. It is undeniable that the systematic use of such long initial inquit, even within an exchange, slows down the flow of conversation, preventing the two voices from segueing into each other seamlessly. However, it does not seem that obstructing interaction was the poets’ primary objective. On the contrary, when several speeches follow each other, poets tend to use rather shorter inquit.⁹⁸ Obstruction to interaction seems to be ‘collateral damage’ rather than the desired output.

Several writers have noted that initial inquit may be used to give a certain speech greater emphasis, either through greater length or through the repeated use of a particularly striking formula, as in

a slight variant, *Guthlac A* (360b). The same remark applies for instances occurring in the first half-line.

⁹⁶ *Genesis A* (872, 882, 895b–896, 1004–5, 1022, 2136, 2173, 2187, 2256, 2273, 2280, 2353–4, 2435b–2436, 2476–7, 2513, 2526b–2527, 2691); *Andreas* (202, 260, 277, 290, 343, 510, 623, 857, 925); *Christ and Satan* (673, 689); *Genesis B* (827); *Guthlac A* (590); and, with a slight variant, *Elene* (396). The typical formula is one line long, but in *Genesis A* it is expanded on several occasions. On this formula, see Creed, ‘The *Andswarode*-System in Old English Poetry’.

⁹⁷ *Andreas* (189, 285, 401, 572, 617, 628, 643, 1184, 1345, 1375); *Elene* (454–5, 462, 619, 662); *Juliana* (105, 130, 147, 175, 319) and, with a slight variant (117).

⁹⁸ Except in *Christ and Satan* and *Guthlac A*, but the low number of relevant instances in both cases makes the observation much less significant.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

Beowulf.⁹⁹ However, the inquit does not merely provide information on the degree of importance of a given speech – it may also provide information on its status and on how it is meant to be interpreted. Thus the following inquit does not merely enhance the solemnity of Beowulf's words; it also identifies them as the last words of a dying man:¹⁰⁰

Biowulf mapelode (he ofer benne spræc,
wunde wælbleate; wisse he gearwe
þæt he dæghwila gedrogen hæfde,
eorðan wynne; ða wæs eall sceacen
dोगorgerimes, deað ungemete neah) (*Beowulf*, 2724–8)¹⁰¹

Translations from the Latin provide even more striking examples, as in this passage when the king of Sodom and Abraham discuss the fate of the people and riches won in battle by Abraham:

dixit autem rex Sodomorum ad Abram da mihi animas cetera tolle tibi
qui respondit ei levo manum meam ad Dominum Deum excelsum pos-
sessorem caeli et terrae (Gen. XIV.21–2)¹⁰²

þa spræc guðcýning,
Sodoma aldor, secgum befyllend,
to Abrahame (him wæs ara þearf).
'Forgif me mennen minra leoda,
þe þu ahreddest herges cræftum
wera wælclommum! ...'
Him þa Abraham andswarode
ædre for eorlum, elne gewurðod,
dome and sigore, drihtlice spræc:
'Ic þe gehate, hæleða waldend,
for þam halgan, þe heofona is
and þisse eorðan agendfrea (*Genesis A*, 2123b–2141)¹⁰³

⁹⁹ On the added emphasis provided by longer inquit, see Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 255–6; Richman, 'The Stylistic Effect and Form of Direct Discourse in Old English Literature', p. 175. On the effect of a stereotyped formula in *Beowulf*, see Stévanovitch, '*Beowulf mapelode*, *Bearn Eþeowes*', p. 21.

¹⁰⁰ On the significance of 'last words' in early Germanic culture, see Harris, 'Beowulf's Last Words'.

¹⁰¹ 'Beowulf spoke formally (he spoke despite his injury, his deadly wound; he very well knew that he had reached the end of his days, of his joy on earth; all his days were gone, his death immeasurably near)'.

¹⁰² 'Then the king of Sodom said to Abram: "Give me the souls and take the rest for yourself." He answered him: "I raise my hand to the lord God, the noble possessor of heaven and earth"'.

¹⁰³ 'Then spoke the battle king, the prince of Sodom, deprived of his men, to Abraham (he was in need of favours): "Grant me the maids of my people, that you have rescued with the might of your army from the captivity of men! ..." Then Abraham answered him quickly in front of the noble men, celebrated for his courage, his glory and his victory, spoke like a lord: "I promise you, ruler of men, before the holy one who is the lord and owner of heaven and earth"'.

In the Vulgate, the two speeches are introduced very neutrally (*dixit ... respondit*) and the speakers are identified clearly, but without any comment on the narrator's part. On the other hand, the Old English poem uses the inquit to express a powerful contrast between the situations of the two men: the first is represented as a lord in name but no longer in fact, having lost his men and his capacity to grant favour, and needing to seek it from others instead, whereas the second has no title but all the attributes of power. That representation impacts the way that the characters' words are interpreted. Without the inquit, the prince's use of an imperative (*Forgif*) might have been interpreted as an order or a demand; with it, it can only be a humble request. Similarly, Abraham's pledge might have been read as a sign of allegiance to a 'ruler of men' (*hæleða waldend*), but the inquit makes it clear that he is in fact speaking as a magnanimous lord, not completely unlike, a few lines later, God promising Abraham many descendants (2204b–2215).

The fact that the inquit may be used to guide the audience's interpretation of the speeches has important consequences for our understanding of the status of Direct Speech in Old English poetry. People often assume that because in Direct Speech the represented words are syntactically independent from the narrative voice, it means that there is less narratorial interference. That is the meaning of 'Direct' in Direct Speech – the idea that the speech is presented without any mediation. See, for example, Frantzen quoting Pizarro:

Joaquín Martínez Pizarro's concept of the 'rhetoric of the scene' is useful in understanding the difference between an 'acted out' exchange and narrative, between a story that is shown and a story that is told ... Pizarro argues that 'the oral narrator' tries 'to become transparent, to vanish from the scene or from his listeners' awareness; by appealing primarily to their dramatic imagination, he invites them to follow an action that does not include him as a judge, critic, or interpreter'. (55–6)¹⁰⁴

Here, the classical opposition between showing and telling shows its limits.¹⁰⁵ Certainly, Direct Speech may be used to promote the illusion of showing without any mediation,¹⁰⁶ but it does not have to.

¹⁰⁴ Frantzen, 'Drama and Dialogue in Old English Poetry', p. 108. Pizarro, *A Rhetoric of the Scene*, p. 13 and 55–6. Frantzen's analysis also relies on other writers with a similar conception of Direct Speech, including Elam: 'dialogue is immediate "spoken action" rather than reference to, or representation of action, so that the central personal, political and moral oppositions which structure the drama are seen and heard to be acted out in the communicational exchange and not described at a narrative remove' (*The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, p. 147, quoted by Frantzen p. 106).

¹⁰⁵ See Introduction ('Direct Speech Reinterpreted').

¹⁰⁶ In that, Direct Speech is not alone: Free Indirect Speech may also be used to promote such an illusion, especially in the case of represented thoughts.

Old English narrators are very unlike the transparent figure described by Pizarro. They often take pains to clarify and interpret the meaning of their stories for their audience – witness the use of gnomes and of statements such as *þæt wæs god cyning!* in *Beowulf* (11b, 863b and 2390b), which stamps the reigns of Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar and Beowulf with a seal of approval. This tendency is even more striking in religious poems, and especially in *Christ and Satan*, in which the poet is not only an interpreter but also an adviser, who explains to the audience what the story should inspire them to do in real life. The massive use of Direct Speech in Old English narrative poetry does not contradict that tendency. The represented words may be independent syntactically, but the inquit is there to ensure the narrator's control over interpretation.¹⁰⁷

After the Speech

As a rule, the end of a speech is not signalled as strikingly as the beginning, but in some cases, a sort of pseudo final inquit is used, which plays a similar role.¹⁰⁸ In several instances,¹⁰⁹ it is made up of the adverb *swa* (exceptionally *þus*) followed by a *verbum dicendi* in the past tense, and then by some information on the speaker or the speech itself. The one-line formula *swa hleoþrode* X occurs on a few occasions (*Guthlac A*, 513; *Andreas*, 461 and 692), but as with the initial inquit there is considerable freedom: concerning the order of the elements, the *verbum dicendi* and also the length of the whole sequence. Those phrases are not true inquit in that they are only ever used in addition to the initial inquit and not in replacement of it. Therefore, their primary function is not to identify the speaker but to offer an additional comment on them and on the import of their speech, as in this extract from *Christ and Satan*:

ða him andsweradan atole gastas,
swarte and synfulle, susle begnornende:
... Swa firenfulle facnum wordum
heora aldorðægn on reordadon,
on cearam cwidum. (*Christ and Satan*, 51–67a)¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ It must be noted, however, that the narrator is not a figure as clearly defined as in much of modern literature. On that topic, see further Chapter 5 (especially 'The Narrator's Voice') and the Conclusion ('A Model for Direct Speech in Old English Poetry').

¹⁰⁸ This development reproduces some elements already published in 'Transitions from Direct Speech to Narration in Old English Poetry'.

¹⁰⁹ Fourteen in the corpus examined here: *Beowulf* (2057–8, 2267–70a, 3018–30a); *Andreas* (461–5a, 692–4a, 1455–6); *Christ and Satan* (65–7, 279–81, 512–14, 659–61a); *Guthlac A* (323–5a, 513–5); and, with slight variants, *Andreas* (818–21) and *Genesis B* (588–90a). See also *The Wanderer* (111), *Daniel* (333, 486), *Psalm 50* (146).

¹¹⁰ 'Then the awful spirits answered him, black and sinful, lamenting their torments ... So the evil ones spoke to their leader with wicked words, in sorrowful sentences.'

The final inquit largely echoes the initial one. The speakers are represented as wicked and unhappy in both. This heavy frame deprives the speech of its autonomy. Any compassion that their lament might have aroused in the audience is pre-empted by that strong reassertion of the intrinsic connection between the demons' pains and their guilt.

Another noteworthy formula is the phrase *æfter ðam / þyssum wordum* ('after those / these words').¹¹¹ At first sight, it resembles the transition markers found in Latin texts, such as *hoc dicto* or *haec audiens* (literally 'this having been said', 'hearing these [words]'), but it seems that the resemblance is only superficial. First of all, in the corpus examined here, *æfter ðam / þyssum wordum* never actually translates an equivalent Latin phrase. In fact, the formula is altogether missing from Latinate texts such as *Juliana* and *Elene*,¹¹² while it occurs twice in *Beowulf*, which pleads against Latin influence.¹¹³ Most importantly, the contexts in which the formula is used suggest that its meaning goes beyond that of a mere transition and might be better translated as 'in conformity with those words' or even 'because of those words' rather than simply 'after those words': it is used to draw attention to the effect of Andreas's prayer (*Andreas*, 88a), to the audience's response to impressive speeches (*Andreas*, 761a; *Exodus*, 299a and 565a), to the fulfilment of a divine prediction (*Andreas*, 1219a) or a pledge (*Beowulf*, 1492a) and to the enforcement of a condemnation (*Christ and Satan*, 628a).¹¹⁴ It seems that the audience is not left to draw their own conclusions from the succession of events but that, once again, the poet is keen to clarify the impact and / or the sincerity of the speech.

The same interest in pointing out the efficacy of a speech may be observed in *Genesis A*, with the use of formulas such as *swa hine nergend heht* or *swa him se eca behead* ('as he had been ordered by the saviour', 'as he had been commanded by the eternal one') just after the end of a speech to indicate that the order is obeyed. In some cases, they merely

¹¹¹ The formula is not very widespread, with only seven instances in the corpus examined here: *Beowulf* (1492a, 2669a); *Andreas* (88a, 761a, 1026a, 1219a); and *Christ and Satan* (628a); see also *Exodus* (299a and 565a), but it is distinctive enough for several critics to have noted its use: Capek, 'A Note on Formula Development in Old Saxon'; Foster, 'The Use of *þa* in Old and Middle English Narratives', p. 410; Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 47; and Fulk, 'Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect, and Date', p. 8.

¹¹² Not only are both texts translated from the Latin, but Cynewulf's style is more influenced by Latin rhetoric than most other Old English poets. See Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity*, pp. 110–37.

¹¹³ In fact, the existence of a similar formula in Old Saxon (*after them uuordum*) suggests it is typically Germanic. On the connection between the two formulas, see Capek, 'A Note on Formula Development in Old Saxon'.

¹¹⁴ There is one possible exception (*Beowulf*, 2669a), in which the formula does not introduce a direct response to a speech, but rather a situation that will test the validity of the speaker's pledge. Another instance (*Andreas*, 1026a) occurs just after a lacuna and thus cannot be analysed.

translate an element present in the source, but they may also develop it or introduce the idea altogether.¹¹⁵

Most of the time, however, the end of a speech is marked much more lightly. There may be no specific textual marking at all, especially – but not exclusively – when the speech is followed by another one, in which case that function is fulfilled by the initial inquit of the second speech.¹¹⁶ In about 70 per cent of all instances, the beginning of a new episode after the end of a speech (be it another speech or not) is signalled with an adverb, almost always *þa*.¹¹⁷

The predominance of *þa* is congruent with what can be observed elsewhere in Old English narrative poetry:

[M]any narrative passages are composed of strings of largely independent units marked and coordinated by *þa*, which functions as an infinitely-repeatable marker of temporal sequentiality and carries little or no grammatical information.¹¹⁸

þa is similar to its Present-Day equivalent ‘then’, in that it is not just a temporal adverb but also and especially a pragmatic marker with an essential function in narratives:

In sum, *then* is a temporal adverb that is not only used by the speaker as time-referential sign, but also as pragmatic marker that introduces the succession of events, intentions and thoughts in the narrative.¹¹⁹

However, whereas Present-Day English uses many different markers to signal narrative structure (e.g. subordinative conjunctions in written texts and ‘well’, ‘so’ and ‘anyway’ in oral narratives), Old English relies almost exclusively on *þa*.

In that, it also differs from Latin prose, which displays greater variety.¹²⁰ The contrast is especially strong between Old English poems and Latin hagiographies, whose style is usually much less paratactic. Compare the following two texts:

¹¹⁵ Relevant instances include *Genesis A* (1314b, 1492, 2370b and 2736b). See also *Elene* (87b).

¹¹⁶ There is no textual marking at all in 23 instances out of 161 when the speech is followed by narrative and in 37 out of 118 when it is followed by another speech (i.e. respectively 14% and 31%, for 21% overall).

¹¹⁷ In some instances, however, *þa* is used in conjunction with other another (e.g. *þa git*, *þa gen* or *þa ædre*) and in others another adverb is used alone (e.g. *eft* or *ædre*). Figures are roughly the same whether the first speech is followed by a second one or by narrative.

¹¹⁸ Foster, ‘The Use of *þa* in Old and Middle English Narratives’, p. 404.

¹¹⁹ González, *Pragmatic Markers in Oral Narrative*, p. 169. On the pragmatic functions of *þa* in Old English narratives, see Enkvist and Wårvik, ‘Old English *þa*, Temporal Claims, and Narrative Structure’. See also Kim, *The Particle ‘þa’ in the West-Saxon Gospels*; Enkvist, ‘Problems Raised by Old English *þa*’; Wårvik, ‘Participants Tracking Narrative Structure’ and ‘Connective or “Disconnective” Discourse Marker?’

¹²⁰ *Autem* (a linking word with a slight value of opposition) is very common, but it competes with several other options, especially *statim* (‘at once’), *et* or *–que* (‘and’), *igitur* (‘then’, ‘so’), *ergo* (‘thus’, ‘therefore’) and *tunc* (‘then’).

The Form of Direct Speech

Dæmon autem rogabat eam, dicens: 'Domina mea, demitte me! Noli me iam amplius hominibus ridiculum facere ...' Et dum hæc diceret dæmon, sancta Iuliana trahebat eum per forum [my italics] (Passio Iulianae, § 12)¹²¹

Ongan þa hreowcearig
siðfæt seofian, sar cwanian,
wyrð wanian, wordum mælde:
'Ic þec halsige, hlæfdige min,
Iuliana, fore godes sibbum,
þæt þu furþur me fraceþu ne wyrce,
edwit for eorlum, þonne þu ær dydest ...'
Da hine seo fæmne forlet
æfter þræchwile [my italics] (*Juliana*, 536b–554a)¹²²

The *Passio Iulianae* presents us with a closely knit passage, making use of several different markers to ensure the coherence and smooth flow of the text: conjunctions (*autem*, *et*, *dum*), present participle (*dicens*), anaphoric pronoun (*hæc*). In this way, speech introduction and conclusion are of equal weights and act as real transitions, i.e. connections between several episodes. By contrast, the Old English passage appears as the succession of two distinct episodes, each with its own introduction, but without any genuine conclusion or transition. This tendency to add new episodes one after the other without attempting to integrate them into a subordinate structure is very characteristic of Old English poetry and one of its recognisably oral features.¹²³

It is worth noticing that Direct Speech is introduced more conspicuously than narrative episodes – perhaps a sign of orality's persisting prestige in Anglo-Saxon culture – but that the essential pattern is the same in both cases: each act (be it verbal or non-verbal) is presented as an independent episode with an explicit beginning and a merely implicit end.¹²⁴ Whenever the narrative resumes with a reference to the speech just delivered, that reference does not act as a mere functional transition, but expresses a meaningful connection between the speech and subsequent actions.

¹²¹ 'So the demon pleaded with her saying: "Milady, let me go, I do not want to be ridiculed still further in front of people ...". And as the demon said those words, Saint Juliana was dragging him across the public square'. For once the *Acta Sanctorum* version is closer than the text edited by Lapidge, as it reads *Domina mea Iuliana*, rather than simply *Domina mea*.

¹²² 'Then, full of sorrow, he started lamenting his expedition, deploring his pain, bemoaning his fate, and said in these words, "I beg you, my lady, Juliana, for the sake of God's peace, not to insult me, not to disgrace me in front of the brave ones any more than you already have ...". Then the girl let him go after that hard time'.

¹²³ See Enkvist, 'Problems Raised by Old English *þa*'; and Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 36–7.

¹²⁴ In some (rare) cases, this lack of explicitness may be a source in confusion, as with *Guthlac A*'s first speech: in the absence of any unambiguous textual marker, its end is variously located at the end of 10a, 17b, 25b and 29b by editors and critics. On the preference of Old English poets for introduction markers (and on the few conclusion markers that do exist), see Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 91–8; Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, pp. 137–42.

Additional Rhetorical Cues

While explicit textual marking is usually enough to determine where a given speech begins and ends, it is often supported by additional textual and metrical cues. Unlike Eddic poetry, Old English poetry cannot rely on stanzaic structure or distinct verse forms to reinforce the limits of speeches.¹²⁵ It shows the same tendency, however, to have the beginning and end of a speech coincide with the beginning and end of a line of poetry. As noted by Heusler,¹²⁶ that fact is relatively unusual as many sentences of Old English poetry start or end at the caesura. There are a few exceptions, especially in *Genesis B* and in Cynewulf's poems. Those found in *Genesis B* are only to be expected as the limits of Direct Speech often coincide with a caesura in Old Saxon poetry.¹²⁷ More surprising are those in *Elene* and *Juliana*. They are still in the minority, but rather more common than elsewhere.¹²⁸ Those exceptions often coincide with relatively short inquit and / or speeches, which suggests that Cynewulf might have been trying to give rather more flexibility to the limits of Direct Speech than what was strictly conventional. Old English poetry may also use hypermetric lines to signal the limits of an episode or introduce many unstressed syllables to slow down the rhythm of a line at the end.¹²⁹ Neither technique is particular to Direct Speech: both may be used for narrative episodes as well.

Poets may also rely on various rhetorical devices to serve the same function. Some are strictly aural: Wine notes for example the use of consonance and homoeoteleuton (the repetition of the same ending) at the end of several episodes in *Juliana*, including speeches, as in this one addressed by Eleusius to Juliana's father:¹³⁰

het me fremdne god,
ofer þa oþre þe we ær cuþon,
welum weorþian, wordum lofian,
on hyge hergan, opþe hi nabban.' [my italics] (*Juliana*, 74b–77)¹³¹

¹²⁵ When an Eddic poem contains both narrative and dialogue, *formyrðislag* is often used for narrative and *ljóðaháttir* for Direct Speech. Poets may also use different verse forms for different characters or different speech acts. See Quinn, 'Verseform and Voice in Eddic Poems'.

¹²⁶ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 238–9.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ It concerns eight beginnings and six ends out of forty in *Elene*, three beginnings and nine ends in *Juliana*. By comparison, *Genesis A* shows the same figures as *Juliana* with twice the number of speeches and *Andreas* has only two speeches beginning at the caesura (out of sixty-eight) and none at all ending there.

¹²⁹ For the use of hypermetric lines to signal the limits of Direct Speech in *Genesis A* and *B*, see Stévanovitch, *La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, pp. 204–5. For the insertion of unstressed syllables, see Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, pp. 125–6.

¹³⁰ Wine, 'Juliana and the Figures of Rhetoric', pp. 8–9.

¹³¹ 'She ordered me to honour a foreign god with riches, to praise him with words and worship him with thoughts instead of the others we have known until now, or else to give her up.'

The Form of Direct Speech

This particular type of echo is very typical of Cynewulf's poetry,¹³² but aural devices are used to this end in all Old English poems, which is not surprising for a tradition still largely oral.¹³³ See for example the use of extra alliteration in this extract from *Beowulf*:

Ic to sæ wille
wið wrað werod wearde healdan.' [my italics] (*Beowulf*, 318b–319)¹³⁴

Other devices rely on meaning as well as sound. Stévanovitch notes several instances when a speech is framed by an envelope pattern,¹³⁵ while Pasternack points out the common use of certain terms or themes to herald the end of an episode.¹³⁶ Just like any other unit in a poem, speeches may end with a reference to eternity or the afterlife. For Pasternack, the device is iconic in that references to the end of life mirror the end of a textual unit. It is also possible, however, that the effect of disconnection is achieved through a change of focus, in this case from a particular situation to a universal statement. Indeed the same objective is achieved with the use of maxims in final position.¹³⁷ they too shift the focus to a universal theme, but they do not necessarily refer to death. The change of focus may also work in the opposite direction. Thus, when a character has been discussing past events or general issues for a while, they often end their speech with words firmly anchored in the situation of utterance, as at the end of Hrothgar's famous 'sermon' (*Beowulf*, 1700–84) or in this extract from Andreas:

Nu ðu miht gehyran, hyse leofesta,
hu he wundra worn wordum cyððe,
swa þeah ne gelyfdon larum sinum
modblinde menn. Ic wat manig nu gyt
mycel mære spell ðe se maga fremede,
rodera rædend, ða ðu aræfnan ne miht,
hreðre behabban, hygeþances gleaw. [my italics] (*Andreas*, 811–17)¹³⁸

¹³² See Steen, *Verse and Virtuosity*, pp. 110–37.

¹³³ Not necessarily in the sense that poems were composed orally, but that they rely on devices typical of oral poetry and are meant to be heard aloud.

¹³⁴ 'I am going to the sea, to hold guard against any hostile troop.'

¹³⁵ Stévanovitch, 'Envelope Patterns in *Genesis A* and *B*'. For the notion of envelope pattern see Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 9–29.

¹³⁶ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, pp. 137–8.

¹³⁷ For the connection between maxims and the end of speeches, see Shippey, 'Principles of Conversation in Beowulfian Speech', p. 124; Bjork, 'Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*', p. 1011; and Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 22–4. See also Fukuchi, 'Gnomic Statements in Old English Poetry'; and Campbell, 'Ends and Meanings: Modes of Closure in Old English Poetry'.

¹³⁸ 'Now you can hear, dearest young man, how he made known a multitude of miracles through his words, and yet blinded people did not believe his teachings. I know now still many more great deeds performed by that powerful one, the master of heaven; you would not be able to listen to all of them, to understand them in your heart, wise in thought.'

After a long development in the third person set in the past (644–810), the sudden proliferation of shifters (first- and second-person pronouns, the adverb *nu* and the vocatives *hyse leofesta* and *hygeþances gleaw*) introduces an abrupt change and ensures that Andreas's tale will not be confused with the narrator's. Within long exchanges, the end of individual speeches may occasionally be marked more lightly, especially if the speech is short, but generally speaking it seems that all speeches are treated similarly, whether they come at the end of an exchange or not.

Manuscript Layout and Punctuation

Last but not necessarily least, the presentation of Direct Speech in manuscripts is worth mentioning.¹³⁹ Of course, there is no reason to think it corresponds to any authorial intent, or even to the work of a single scribe. O'Brien O'Keeffe explains that '[i]f points travel with texts, then they do so in the way glosses do and are subject to change by accretion'.¹⁴⁰ The same can be said of other visual aspects such as the division into fitts, the use of capital letters, the layout and the position of potential illustrations: they may all be reproduced from one copy to another but are subject to change to some extent, so that the end result cannot be seen as the product of a single intention. Yet, those elements are instructive because they are the only data available on how the poems were received – perhaps not at the time they were composed, but still at a period much closer to the time of composition than our own.

Unlike modern edited texts, Old English poetic manuscripts do not allow the reader to identify Direct Speech at first glance. Some marking does exist, however. Frantzen even suggests that the punctuation of *Juliana* in the Exeter Book might have been designed to facilitate the performance of the poem with different voices by clarifying who speaks where.¹⁴¹ A similar point has been made for the dialogue poems of Eddic poetry (*For Scírnis*, *Locasenna*, *Fáfnismál*, *Hárbarðzljóð* and *Vafðrúðnismál*), which might buttress the hypothesis of a Germanic dramatic tradition in the early Middle Ages, but the Old English evidence is not nearly as strong as its Norse counterpart. In both major Eddic manuscripts (Codex Regius and AM 748), names of speakers are given in marginal notations for the dialogue poems, so that the reader does not have to deduce who speaks from the context, but can know for sure at first glance.¹⁴² The punctuation of *Juliana* is much less helpful.

¹³⁹ See also Louvriot, 'Discours direct et ponctuation des manuscrits poétiques vieil-anglais'.

¹⁴⁰ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 171.

¹⁴¹ Frantzen, 'Drama and Dialogue in Old English Poetry', p. 109.

¹⁴² See Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, pp. 203–12, and 'The Performance of the Poetic Edda', p. 301. Gunnell further notes that the only manuscripts where similar

Frantzen's analysis relies on the description of the manuscript provided by O'Brien O'Keeffe, who notes a connection between punctuation and Direct Speech in *Juliana*:

Most heavy punctuation or combinations of points and capitals mark the opening and closing of formal speeches by Juliana or her tormentors ... In *Juliana*, points are rarely used within a speech. When used, however, they set off direct address from the rest of the text.¹⁴³

The description is accurate, but it can be misleading. It is true that punctuation is over-represented at the beginning and closing of speeches (about one-third of all points, for a relatively small amount of text), but it also occurs elsewhere, with one-third of all points located in narrative and another one-third within speeches. Furthermore, the marking of vocatives is not systematic. In fact, only the name Juliana is set off that way,¹⁴⁴ with a capital and at least one point (96a, 167a, 540a). Usually, a point followed by a capital is indicative of stronger punctuation, but in this case the capital is not very significant as many words starting with <i>, including the name 'Juliana', are systematically capitalised in the Exeter Book. The point is more interesting, as other instances of the name 'Juliana' are without it, but other names are occasionally signalled with a point,¹⁴⁵ so that significance should not be overstated. Most importantly, punctuation is not always exactly where a modern reader would expect it. A speech may be introduced without any punctuation at all,¹⁴⁶ and in some cases punctuation precedes the inquit rather than the words of the characters themselves.¹⁴⁷

A closer look at the rest of the corpus shows that those characteristics are not peculiar to *Juliana*. Generally speaking, the punctuation of Old English poems is sparse and unsystematic. It seems to reflect a relatively personal reading of the texts rather than rigid principles. Scribes may use it to clarify metre or syntax or else to emphasise a

notation is used at the time contain drama or 'works meant to be performed in dramatic fashion' ('The Performance of the Poetic Edda', p. 301).

¹⁴³ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 162–3.

¹⁴⁴ Other vocatives (none of which is a proper noun) are without punctuation: *awyrged womsceaða*, 'cursed criminal' (211a), *seo dyreste / ond seo weorþeste wuldorcynige, / dryhtne ussum*, 'the dearest one and most precious in the eyes of the glorious king, our lord' (247b–249a), *beorna hleo*, 'protector of men' (272a), *feond moncynnes*, 'enemy of mankind' (317b), *sawla feond*, 'enemy of souls' (348) and *ead mæg*, 'blessed girl' (352a). All those examples occur towards the beginning of a speech and may thus assist the identification of the addressee and the speaker, but none is preceded or followed by a point.

¹⁴⁵ The punctuation of lines 303–4a reads thus (within the brackets): [þæt he acwellan het cristes þegnas · petrus · , paulus ·]. See also 499b–500: [þa forman men · adam , aeu · þam ic ealdor oðþrong].

¹⁴⁶ See 272–82b, 430b–453, 461–530a and 632–4.

¹⁴⁷ See 68b–77, 108–16, 144–6, 261–6, 347b–350a and 619–27a.

rhetorical device. In a given text, it usually serves all three functions, but in varying proportions.¹⁴⁸

In theory, four different options are available to the scribe, with (from the lightest to the heaviest): no punctuation; a single point; a point followed by a capital; a strong punctuation (e.g. :) followed by a large capital, sometimes ornamented, to show the beginning of a new fitt or poem. In practice, scribes do not all make full use of the possibilities offered by that system and each poem has its specificities.¹⁴⁹ For example, in *Guthlac* A points are relatively rare and almost always followed by a capital, so that the scribe is only using three of the four available options, whereas in *Andreas* points are very frequent and only some of them are followed by a capital, which allows for a clearer hierarchy. As for the poems in Junius 11, their metre is systematically signalled with points so that the presence of a single point cannot provide information on style or syntax.

Even so, the punctuation of Direct Speech follows similar trends in all poems. The end of a speech is signalled by punctuation in about 90 per cent of all cases. A single point may be used, but stronger punctuation is more common: usually a point followed by a capital, but not infrequently a strong punctuation marking the end of a fitt. The beginning of a speech unit is almost always marked as well, but not always in the same place. In general, the beginning of the inquit is marked more strongly and more systematically than the first word of the speech, but both options may be selected, sometimes at the same time.

The limits of a fitt often coincide with those of a speech.¹⁵⁰ Admittedly, a fitt is never made up of a single speech and only rarely corresponds to an exchange. In fact, a new fitt often begins in the middle of an exchange, sometimes even between a question and its answer (e.g. *Genesis B*, 821; *Elene*, 454 and 619; *Juliana*, 105; *Beowulf*, 258), and occasionally in the middle of a speech (e.g. *Genesis B*, 438; *Andreas*, 950; *Beowulf*, 1740). Clearly, neither the exchange nor the speech is perceived as an inviolable unit. Still, the fact that a new section often starts with the beginning or the end of a speech suggests that those borders were seen as natural pauses in the text or, at least, as relatively prominent moments.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ See Mitchell, 'The Dangers of Disguise'; Donoghue, 'A Point Well Taken'.

¹⁴⁹ As points travel with texts and existing manuscripts compile texts likely taken from several sources, each poem (and not just each manuscript) has its own punctuation 'system'.

¹⁵⁰ The function of fitts is unclear in itself. About the Exeter Book, Krapp and Dobbie write: 'for the most part, the sectional divisions of the manuscript correspond closely to natural divisions of thought' (*The Exeter Book*, pp. xvii–xviii). In other words, like punctuation, they are not random, but they do not obey very rigid rules.

¹⁵¹ In *Genesis A*, illustrations are also frequently inserted just before or after a speech: e.g. 205, 1035, 1313 and 1766.

It is important to remember that the marks of punctuation used to signal the limits of Direct Speech may also be found in the narrative and within speeches. Each poem is different, but, in general, whether within narrative or speeches, points tend to signal a new idea, often in addition to a logical connector (*swa, þa, þonne, symle*) or an emphatic negation. Within Direct Speech, points may also draw attention to personal pronouns and imperatives.

As such, it is impossible to say that a specific type of punctuation is used to signal Direct Speech or that punctuation can help the reader to tell narrative apart from Direct Speech at first glance. Not only are the signs used to mark the beginning of a speech the same as those used to mark the beginning of a narrative episode, but long speeches may be divided into several units, marked in much the same way as narrative units. The reason why in *Juliana* punctuation seems especially frequent around the limits of Direct Speech is probably not that Direct Speech receives a specific treatment but simply that most of the events in the poem are speech events.

Speech units are marked systematically enough to suggest they were perceived as relatively prominent and coherent units. It is important to note, though, that what is seen as a coherent unit is not the words pronounced by the character, but those words *and* the narrator's inquit, i.e. the whole speech event. In other words, scribes do not try to isolate an alien voice from the narrative, but rather to emphasise the most striking events in the narrative, including speech events.

Conclusion

Several conclusions may be drawn from this survey. First of all, the attention given to the marking of Direct Speech, textual and otherwise, shows that speeches were seen as important moments in the text. Second, the way that the marking is done confirms the relative lack of interest of Old English poetry in dialogue, even when compared to other early medieval texts. The inquit may constitute an important obstacle, but it is only part of a more general trend. Narratives are organised into loosely connected series of clearly introduced units. There is no dialogue in the sense that speeches are not organised into a complex interactive and interconnected structure. The basic structural unit is not the exchange but the speech itself (with its inquit). In many ways, that unit is marked in the same way as is a narrative unit. As such, while individual speeches are signalled clearly, there is no radical differentiation between Direct Speech and narrative. Last, while Direct Speech is often seen as a way to represent voices independent from the voice of the narrator, it does not work that way in Old English poetry: through the inquit, narrators keep a tight control on interpretation.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

The form of Direct Speech is thus very typical of a poetry strongly marked with orality, both through its use of paratactic structures and because, unlike many modern novels, it does not treat speeches as something necessarily alien to a written tale but as an integral part of narrative. The slight variations observed in the corpus tend to confirm that diagnosis. Generally, the model outlined here is observed especially closely in poems without any known written source (*Beowulf*, *Guthlac A*), and to a slightly lesser extent in a poem based on a written source marked with orality itself (*Genesis A*).¹⁵² On the other hand, the poems that handle conventions most freely, showing the greatest degree of experimentation, are *Juliana* and *Elene*, composed by one of the most 'literate' Old English poets: not only does Cynewulf work from a Latin written source, like many other poets, but the influence of Latin rhetoric in his works suggests he had much reading experience, while his use of a runic acrostic to sign his name implies a certain affinity with writing and its visual devices. In spite of those small variations, the corpus is largely homogeneous: the influence of Latin written culture may be felt here and there but it never truly challenges the conventions outlined in this chapter.

¹⁵² Those poems are also often considered relatively older, see Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*. For the problems with dating Old English poems, see above, p. 19.

The Content and Context of Direct Speech

Hart, Bartlett and Klaeber, quoted in the Introduction ('Traditional Views on Direct Speech'), ascribe the lack of interaction in Old English poetic speeches to a taste for formality and ceremony. According to them, poets enjoy speeches for their own sake and not for what they may contribute to the action of the poem. While some elements of that diagnosis are undoubtedly true, especially regarding *Beowulf*, others need to be revised. This chapter reassesses the three major contentions of the 'traditional' view on Direct Speech in Old English poetry: that it is too formal, that it is ceremonial and that it impedes action.

Excessive Formality

The notion that lack of dynamism in Old English poetic speeches is due to their excessively formal style is only partly based on fact. It is true that some characteristic elements of Old English poetic style tend to slow down the pace of speeches, and those elements will be considered briefly below. First, however, it is important to acknowledge a number of modern preconceptions that may alter our perception of the issue.

Formality and Orality

Paradoxically, even though Old English poetic speeches are the product of a tradition steeped in orality, they may appear very 'written' to a modern reader because of their great stylistic elaboration. The connection between writing and greater sophistication is far from universal, however. It feels natural to us because we live in a society in which writing has a quasi-monopoly on 'serious' communication, including literature.¹ Admittedly, from the very beginning, writing was used to

¹ The etymology of the word 'literature', from Latin *littera*, 'letter', is a witness to the monopoly of writing on that particular field. Ong disapproves of the use of that word to designate both written literature and oral productions such as tales or poems. For him, to call such forms literature is to deny their specificity and apply to them inappropriate norms (*Orality and Literacy*, pp. 10–15). However, there is no other adequate word to describe stylistically elaborate textual productions. Etymologically, the word 'poetry'

preserve texts that were felt to deserve, more than others, that additional effort and material. Even so, oral transmission long remained legitimate for all speech acts, from the most humble to the most highly respected. Originally, all discourse was oral and writing was merely a marginal technique of preservation. Writing only very gradually developed to the point where it became even possible to think of orality and literacy as a dichotomy. The evolution of the representation of speech in literature is directly connected to the change in the respective status of orality and literacy.

First, whether the extant poems were composed orally or not, it is clear that orality was still seen as a legitimate medium for poetry and even as the dominant paradigm, at least for vernacular compositions.² Furthermore, even written literature was received aurally,³ so that narrative passages and speeches were both designed to be performed aloud. As such, there would have been no reason to perceive speeches as intrinsically less literary or to use informal style to represent them and save formality for narration.

There is also an important difference between the values attached to orality in Anglo-Saxon society and in our own. Modern mythologies often oppose the true hero, silent but effective, to the smooth talker, attractive but without substance. Paradoxically, the silent hero is often represented as a typically Germanic figure: see for example American myths of the frontier, in particular in Roosevelt's writings,⁴ or, closer to us, this text written by Earl:

We still live in a largely Anglo-Saxon world, and even over a millennium the child is father to the man ... The hall may have become the office ... but the relations of such traditionally male-dominated institutions to women, the family, and religion remain as teasingly unresolved as ever and are still the subject of much of our literature. So too the broken oath,

(from Greek *poiesis*, 'creation') is much more appropriate, but it is now strictly associated with metrical works and thus too restrictive. The word 'literature' is therefore used here to designate both written and oral works, in spite of Ong's valid objections.

² This fact can be deduced from the various representations of poets in Old English poetry, which show a *scop* in performance rather than a writer. Whether there were still active poets matching that ideal figure at the time when the extant poems of the corpus were composed is of course another matter. On that topic, see Niles, 'The Myth of the Anglo-Saxon Oral Poet'.

³ Silent and solitary reading was mostly unknown in the Middle Ages. It was very common to read for others so that the audience of a given text probably included many more listeners than readers. See Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, pp. 48–60; Wormald, *English Drawings of the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*; and Opland, *Anglo-Saxon Oral Poetry*.

⁴ Roosevelt represents American settlers in the West as 'Anglo-Saxon' heroes and American expansion to the West as the continuation of the Germanic expansion of late Antiquity in *The Winning of the West*, pp. 13–15. For the importance of the figure of the 'Anglo-Saxon' hero in Roosevelt's writings and American imperial culture more generally, see Bonfiglio, *Race and the Rise of Standard America*, pp. 197–200 and Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, pp. 3–6.

the failed promise, the conflict of loyalties, the silent hero, the alienation of the individual from society, and the problematic roles of women and kinship in social life.⁵

And yet it is not easy to find traces of that silent hero in Old English texts. Even in the midst of battle, the heroes of *The Battle of Maldon* keep talking. In *Beowulf*, the only major characters that remain silent are monsters, whereas the hero has to prove he is a talented speaker in order to be acknowledged: the first test faced by Beowulf, his confrontation with Unferth, is exclusively verbal.⁶ The equal importance of words and deeds is stressed much earlier on, however, during the exchange with the coastguard:

What I find most interesting about this passage is that the coast guard purports to judge both Beowulf's words and his deeds, though he so far has firsthand knowledge only of his words ... I suspect that the speaker of Old English did not perceive as necessary or natural the distance between word and concept that seems so obvious to the modern speaker. A phrase like 'empty words', so typical of mainstream western thought with its anxiety about language that lacks substance, seems foreign to Old English literature, whose rhetorical ethic is better expressed by such collocations as *wordhord*, which connects language with things of value, and *wordum and worcum* (like *wordum and dædum*, a common phrase), which, unlike similar modern phrases, asserts the similarity of language and action even while recognizing their distinctness.⁷

That conception of speech as a form of action – and not as its opposite – is not specific to the heroic world. According to Ong, it is on the contrary prevalent in all oral cultures:

The fact that oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven. Deeply typographic folk forget to think of words as primarily oral, as events, and hence as necessarily powered: for them, words tend rather to be assimilated to things, 'out there' on a flat surface. Such 'things' are not so readily associated with magic, for they are not actions, but are in a radical sense dead, though subject to dynamic resurrection.⁸

For Bjork, that notion is also closely linked to religious beliefs and, particularly in the Christian context of Anglo-Saxon England, to 'the

⁵ Earl, 'Beowulf and the Origins of Civilization', p. 70.

⁶ See Chapter 1 ('Structure of Exchanges') and Silber, 'Rhetoric as Prowess in the Unferð Episode'.

⁷ Baker, 'Beowulf the Orator', pp. 9–10. See also Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 208–22.

⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 32–3. See also Ong, *The Presence of the Word and Interfaces of the Word*, pp. 230–71.

notion of Christ as Logos and the notion that the saints are part of Christ's body',⁹ to which one may add the notion that saints fight with 'spiritual weapons' (*mid gæstlicum / wæpnum*, *Guthlac A*, 177b–178a) and especially with 'the sword of the Spirit that is the word of God' (*gladium Spiritus quod est verbum Dei*, Eph. VI.17).

Admittedly, in Old English poetry the word of God is occasionally represented as written, especially in *Elene*.¹⁰ Even in that poem, though, the reception of scriptures tends to be represented as aural.¹¹ Generally speaking, the living and immediate word of God is shown most positively. That theme is especially central in *Genesis B*, in which the error of Adam and Eve is to have preferred an intermediate to the living presence of God's word,¹² but also, to a perhaps lesser extent, in *Andreas*, in which the power of speech is emphasised, whereas writing is associated with cannibals.¹³

In short, whether orality is compared to writing or silence, it always appears as most effective and most positive. Not that all speech acts are viewed as perfect. Instances of deceitful and / or erroneous speeches are relatively common. However, in all cases the deceit or the error lies in the intent of the speaker, not in the nature of speech. Moreover, it is almost always corrected through speech.

Some critics have seen in *Genesis B* a representation of the fallibility of language, especially in its oral form. Thus, Overing reinterprets the traditional allegorical reading of Adam as rational thought and Eve as bodily sensation as an opposition between a discourse of dominance and a reality that cannot be fully accounted for by that discourse.¹⁴ As for Jager, he sees the poem as the representation of the opposition between the textual culture of Christianity and the oral and visual culture of paganism.¹⁵

Such interpretations are problematic because they rely on questionable binary oppositions. Language may be an abstract system, but

⁹ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, p. 18.

¹⁰ For Hill ('Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*'), the scriptures are primarily associated with the Jews and the poem opposes the Letter (understood literally by the Jews) to the Spirit (understood and accepted for the mystery it is by Christians). However, as noted by Bridges (*Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, pp. 237–8), numerous references to the scriptures concern Christians: the narrator (1254b–1255), Judas after his conversion (825b–826a and 1211a) and especially *Elene* (288–90a, 364–76, 670–4 and 852–5a).

¹¹ See the formula *Hwæt, we þæt gehyrdon þurh halige bec*, 'Listen! We have heard from sacred books' (*Elene*, 364, 670 and 852). On that topic, see Schaefer, 'Hearing from Books'.

¹² Jager, 'Invoking / Revoking God's Word'. See also Stévanovitch, 'Trahison par fidélité'.

¹³ Shaw, 'Translation and Transformation in *Andreas*'. On the connection between cannibalism and writing in the poem, see also Godlove, 'Bodies as Borders'; Irving, 'A Reading of *Andreas*', especially pp. 218–19.

¹⁴ Overing, 'On Reading Eve'. On Adam and Eve as reason versus sensuality, see Vickrey, 'The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*'; Hill, 'The Fall of Angels and Man in the Old English *Genesis B*'.

¹⁵ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p. 98.

speech is always incarnate (in a body or on paper) and thus cannot be opposed to materiality.¹⁶ Similarly, textual culture may not rely on the same type of visual tokens that oral culture does, but it definitely relies on visual signs as well. Additionally, the notion of a written culture entirely separate and distinct from oral culture can make sense only in a fully literate society, not in a transitional one as in Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁷

Perhaps even more importantly, those interpretations are unsatisfactory because they go against the 'rhetorical ethic' described by Baker above. Whereas (post)modern literatures can be full of hesitation and deliberate contradiction, of signs of lack, otherness, instability and even chaos, Old English poetry shows full confidence in the capacity of speech to express meaning, to reveal the truth and to act on the world. When confusion does occur, it is usually not deliberate – and thus meaningful as in (post)modern literature – but rather the result of unintended circumstances. It may be that the modern reader is unfamiliar with notions that would have been obvious to the intended audience or that the poet was careless: not all the extant poems are masterpieces and even those that are were probably not conceived of as unified wholes, completed once and for all by an author intent to master every single detail of their text.¹⁸ In fact, minor inconsistencies are not infrequent. Take Beowulf's oath before confronting Grendel's mother, for instance (1490b–1491): he promises to kill her with Hrunting, but will end up doing so with another sword. In a postmodern text, such a contradiction would necessarily be meaningful, suggesting the unpredictability of life, perhaps even the absurdity of making commitments. And yet, nothing in the poem suggests that Beowulf failed his promise. On the contrary, Hrothgar appears fully satisfied (1700–09a). In Austinian terms,¹⁹ Beowulf's performative act is represented as felicitous in every respect. It suggests some toleration for minor contradictions, but also a great deal of faith in the performative power of speech, as it apparently takes a lot to derail the successful completion of an oath.

To sum up, speech is represented in Old English poetry as highly respectable and effective and it is treated as such. In other words, it

¹⁶ In Old English poetry, speech is in fact often explicitly represented as located in the body and especially in the chest: see Jager, 'The Word in the "*Breost*"' and 'Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry'.

¹⁷ Buchelt criticises Jager on those grounds in 'All about Eve', pp. 142–9. On transitional literacy, see Ong, *Orality and Literacy*; O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*.

¹⁸ For a criticism of postmodern critics and their refusal to admit the possibility that some poems, such as *Genesis B*, might be imperfect and their attempts to explain away all contradictions as deliberate devices, see Shippey, 'Hell, Heaven, and the Failures of *Genesis B*', p. 163.

¹⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. He uses the word 'infelicities' to describe all the ways in which a performative act may go wrong (e.g. if it does not follow the established procedure, if the speaker is not entitled to perform such an act, if they are insincere, etc.).

may be formal but that formality is only excessive from a modern, literate perspective. In the context of Anglo-Saxon culture, it is completely appropriate to the status of orality. It is true, however, that several aspects of that formality contribute to slow down the pace of speeches. Some of those aspects are worth considering briefly.

Formality and Efficiency

The style of Old English poetry has been described by Robinson as 'appositive' because many of its typical devices rely on the juxtaposition of several elements.²⁰ In particular, he mentions variation, compounds, parallel structures and the insertion of narrative episodes without any obvious connection to the main narrative.²¹

Such a style does not promote linear reading. Most noticeably, the insertion of several terms in variation tends to break the flow of the sentence and delay its completion. Interestingly enough, the device is not used exclusively or even in preference for descriptive or contemplative scenes. On the contrary, performative speeches (orders or promises, for instance) tend to be particularly elaborate and thus interspersed with numerous appositions.

More fundamentally, appositive style does not guide the reader or listener efficiently from one idea to another, but rather encourages them to consider several ideas at the same time and to determine for themselves how they interact:

The distinguishing feature of apposition (or variation) is its parataxis – its lack of an expressed logical connection between the apposed elements ... The relationship between the elements of an appositive construction and the relevance of these elements to the sentence at large must be inferred from their proximate and parallel status ...

[T]he logically open, implicit quality of apposition is shared by other stylistic devices in the poem, and in concert they create a reticent, appositive style which is intimately cooperative with the tone and theme of the poem.²²

The formulaic nature of Old English verse also promotes that kind of active reading as the audience is constantly required to think back to other instances of the same formula or theme and to reflect on how the new instance compares to those already known.

The consequences of those stylistic features for the reception of Direct Speech are nowhere more obvious than in the case of argumen-

²⁰ Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*.

²¹ The last device is only truly typical of *Beowulf*, the poem on which Robinson's study is based, whereas the other features are found in all narrative poems.

²² Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, pp. 3–6. See also Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, especially pp. 20–3 and 162–76.

tative speeches. Modern readers tend to expect an argument to proceed logically from point A to point B through all the requisite intermediate steps. Link words assist that process by clarifying both the number of steps and how they are logically connected. Old English poetry does use such words, including in Direct Speech,²³ but in general they do not support the main structure of the argument. Consider for example Juliana's rejection of Eleusius:

Si credideris Deo meo, & adoraueris patrem et filium et sanctum spiritum, accipiam te maritum. Quod si nolueris, quære tibi aliam uxorem. [my italics] (*Passio Iulianae*, § 1)²⁴

lc þe mæg gesecgan þæt þu þec sylfne ne þearft
swiþor swencan. Gif þu soðne god
lufast ond gelyfest, ond his lof rærest,
ongietest gæsta hleo, ic beo gearo sona
unwaclice willan þines.
Swylce ic þe secge, gif þu to sæmran gode
þurh deofolgield dæde biþencest,
hætsð hæpenweoh, ne meaht þu habban mec,
ne geþreatian þe to gesingan.
Næfre þu þæs swiðlic sar gegearwast
þurh hæstne nið heardra wita,
þæt þu mec onwende worda þissa. [my italics] (*Juliana*, 46–57)²⁵

Cynewulf scrupulously translates the link words of the Latin speech (see italics) but they no longer constitute the true backbone of the argument. Instead, the poet develops a rich network of binary oppositions: the true God versus inferior ones; hopeful belief versus (potentially misplaced) trust; praise versus idolatry; being ready to act resolutely versus readying torture instruments. Only semantics helps the audience to identify those pairs: the concepts appear close to each other, but the relations between them are not explicitly stated or defined. In this manner, an implicit argument is made, which is not quite the same as in the Latin source. The choice offered to Eleusius is displaced: it is no longer a matter of what he must do to marry Juliana but of what his

²³ *Forþon* ('therefore', 'because'), *þeah* ('however', 'although') and *ac* ('but') are particularly common. They tend to occur more often in Direct Speech than in narrative.

²⁴ 'If you believe in my God and worship the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I will accept you as my husband. But if you do not want to, look for another wife.'

²⁵ 'I can tell you that you do not need to torment yourself. If you love and believe in the true God and sing his praise, if you acknowledge the protector of souls, I will be ready to do your will at once and resolutely. Similarly I tell you that if you trust an inferior god out of idolatry and invoke pagan idols, you cannot have me nor threaten me into marrying you. Never will you prepare suffering so intense, cruel torments born out of violent hostility, that you may swerve me from these words.'

Direct Speech in Beowulf

soul should yearn for.²⁶ The link words help to underline the existence of two different options, but they are no longer essential to the structure of the argument.

Furthermore, the argument is now part of a much larger one, which extends beyond the limits of Juliana's speech. Throughout the poem, the notions of 'true divinity', 'true protection' and 'true faith' are echoed, from one character to another, sometimes associated with Christianity and sometimes with paganism, so that the audience is made to reflect on the true meaning of those concepts. Such echoes reinforce the unity and the coherence of the poem and thus play a major structural role. However, that structure is both open and flexible: there is no true direction to it, no obligation to spot every single element that contributes to it.

To a modern audience, such an argument may very well appear excessively ornate and undramatic. Not undramatic in the sense that the exchange lacks flamboyance, but because the conversation seems to be going nowhere. From the beginning to the end of the poem, it is the same argument. And yet, the multiple echoes are not merely ornamental – rather, they progressively enrich the argument so that by the end of the poem it has gained in depth considerably.

The meditative reading practised in monasteries (*ruminatio*) is much more suitable to that type of text than a quick skim through. Not that all extant poems were necessarily aimed at such an audience, but it seems likely that, whatever the exact circumstances of reception, poems would have been read slowly enough to give the audience time to reflect on what they heard – and that the frequent use of the same texts would have allowed them to deepen their understanding with each performance.²⁷

Ceremonial Speeches

Beowulf is undoubtedly characterised by an interest in ceremonial speeches, i.e. speeches motivated and informed by an etiquette, by a social ritual that is no longer a simple interaction between individuals but already a process connecting 'the participants to institutions and activities that transcend the present moment'.²⁸ Thus *Beowulf* is

²⁶ The desirability of the Christian worldview is further emphasised through the conventional pun on *lufian*, *gelyfan* and *lof*, see Kintgen, 'Lif, Lof, Leof, Lufu and Geleafa in Old English Poetry'.

²⁷ On the kind of reading required by medieval works, see Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, pp. 195–233 and, on reading Cynewulf more specifically, Regan, 'Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*', pp. 252–3.

²⁸ Perelman, 'The Conditions, Consequences, and Structure of Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*', p. 22. Perelman's analysis is based on Eliade's definition of sacred time in *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 68.

accepted into Hrothgar's court after a series of exchanges with increasingly high-ranking representatives of royal authority.²⁹ If Unferth has some substance as an individual character, Wulfgar and the unnamed coastguard appear to exist merely as embodiments of social functions. Perelman also notes that all the speaking characters in the poem 'are closely connected, either by birth or official position, to the Anglo-Saxon institution of kingship' and that the official nature of a number of speeches is occasionally signalled explicitly, for instance through the use of the word *mepelwordum* ('formal words', 'words to be used in an assembly') or of the *mabelode* formula.³⁰

Those features are without equivalent in the rest of the corpus. The relative lack of interest in social institutions in religious poems is partly due to their plots: in most of them, social institutions are either non-existent (*Guthlac A*, *Genesis A and B*, *Christ and Satan*) or pagan / Jewish and therefore denigrated (*Andreas*, *Juliana*). However, even religious poems offer a few opportunities for the representation of institutions and those opportunities deserve some attention.

Human Institutions Outside Beowulf

Latin hagiographies occasionally feature unnamed representatives of secular power who do not have much substance as characters but who contribute to a form of realism in the representation of society. There are very few instances in the corpus examined here, so it is not possible to deduce the existence of a general rule. Still, it is interesting to note that when such instances do occur in the *Passio Iulianae* and the *recensio casanatensis*, they are without equivalent in the corresponding Old English poems.

Thus, whereas the Latin Eleusius sends messengers to Juliana once he has achieved the rank of prefect (§ 1), his Old English counterpart always interacts with her directly. The demons tormenting Andreas in prison in the original *Praxeis Andreou* are also handled differently in the Old English and the Latin versions. The *recensio casanatensis* opts for realism, replacing the demons with unnamed human characters.³¹ By contrast, the Old English poem retains the demons but has some of their words delivered by Satan himself, so that the role of subordinates is downplayed.

²⁹ For an analysis of that sequence, see Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 208–22. He writes (p. 208): 'there are no fewer than ten separate speeches, carefully choreographed in an elaborate pattern which establishes the Danish court as a sophisticated and mannered milieu, where particular customs prevail'.

³⁰ Perelman, 'The Conditions, Consequences, and Structure of Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*', pp. 23–6.

³¹ At least, that is what the text seems to suggest: § 25 and 26 have been replaced with a short sentence in the *recensio casanatensis*, so the allusion to a group of people can only refer back to the Mermedonian people mentioned shortly before.

Those two examples are consistent with wider trends in Old English hagiographic poetry and in particular with its tendency to simplify the plot and reduce the cast of characters to central pairs of antagonists representing the struggle of Christianity against evil: Elene and Judas, Cyriacus and a demon, Juliana and her father, Juliana and a demon, etc.

Elene presents a slightly different picture, however. Elene represents a secular power that is in the process of embracing Christianity and which is therefore shown positively. Generally speaking, Elene's power is much more direct and personal than Hrothgar's. She usually acts alone, which helps to reinforce the allegorical dimension of the poem – as the Church Militant, she has no need of others to impose her will.³² Still, as noted by Klein,³³ Elene is almost systematically represented surrounded with her soldiers, even if they usually remain in the background. On one occasion, they actually get to speak:

Hæc eis dicentibus, ecce veniunt milites ad eos dicentes, Venite, vocat vos Regina. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 7)³⁴

Pa cwom þegna heap
to þam heremeðle. Hreopon friccan,
caseres bodan: 'Eow þeos cwen laþaþ,
secgas to salore, þæt ge seonoðdomas
rihte reccen. Is eow rædes þearf
on meðelstede, modes snyttro.' (*Elene*, 549b–554)³⁵

It is surprising for such a short speech (only four words in Latin) to have been retained, especially considering that its semantic content is very limited and could easily have been conveyed through narrated speech.³⁶ It is likely that the speech has an iconic function, i.e. it may not be here for its content but for the image it provides of Elene's exercise of power. An interest in the representation of Elene's secular power might also explain why Cynewulf uses the verb *maðelian* relatively often in the poem,³⁷ even when it is not strictly appropriate. It is not always used when Elene addresses the council of wise men (see

³² On that notion, see for example Calder, *Cynewulf*, pp. 111–37.

³³ Klein, 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 65.

³⁴ 'As they were saying those words, at once soldiers came who told them: "Come, the queen is calling you."'

³⁵ 'Then a troop of soldiers came to the assembly of warriors. The heralds proclaimed, the messengers of the emperor: "Our queen calls you, men summoned to the palace, so you can tell her rightly the decisions of the synod. Your advice is needed at the assembly, the cleverness of your mind."'

³⁶ On the tendency of Old English poetry to avoid very short speeches, see Chapter 1 ('Speech Lengths').

³⁷ For nine speeches out of forty. It is the only poem outside *Beowulf* using the verb so often.

286b–287, 384b–385), but it occurs several times in her conversation with Judas, even on one occasion when the poem stresses the fact Elene is addressing a single man (604, *Elene mæpelode to þam anhagan*, ‘Elene spoke formally to the solitary one’).

It seems, then, that there are hints of social rituals in *Elene*. Their importance should not be exaggerated, however. They certainly do not compare to anything found in *Beowulf*. Still, it seems that they are deliberate on the part of the poet and that they are used to reinforce the status of Elene as a leader of men, an impression already promoted by the use of conventional themes, such as the voyage at sea.³⁸

Biblical poems only rarely show human institutions. One interesting exception is the encounter of Abraham with the king of Salem. Whereas Abraham’s dealings with Abimelech (2621–735) are more personal than official, this passage has a true political dimension. It is also one of the scenes in which the poet handles the source most freely. If a taste for ceremony was an intrinsic part of the Old English poetic tradition, it would surely show here:

at vero Melchisedech rex Salem proferens panem et vinum erat enim
sacerdos Dei altissimi
benedixit ei et ait benedictus Abram Deo excelso qui creavit caelum et
terram et benedictus Deus excelsus quo protegente hostes in manibus
tuis sunt et dedit ei decimas ex omnibus (Gen. XIV.18–20)³⁹

Him ferede mid
Solomia sinces hyrde;
þæt wæs se mæra Melchisedec,
leoda *bisceop*. Se *mid lacum* com
fyrdrinca fruman fægre gretan,
Abraham arlice, and him *on sette*
godes bletsunge, and swa gyddode:
‘Wæs ðu gewurðod on wera rime
for þæs eagum þe ðe æsca tir
æt guðe forgeaf!
... On swaðe sæton; ne meahton siðwerod
guðe spowan, ac hie god flymde,
se ðe æt feohtan mid frumgarum
wið ofer-mægnes egsan sceolde
handum sinum, and halegu treow,
seo þu wið rodora weard rihte healdest.’
Him þa se beorn *bletsunga lean*
purh hand ageaf, and þæs hereteames

³⁸ On that theme, see Diamond, ‘Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry’.

³⁹ ‘And then Melchisedech, the king of Salem, blessed him, offering him bread and wine for he was a priest of the most high God, and said: “You are blessed, Abraham, by the most high God who created heaven and earth, and the most high God is blessed whose protection placed your enemies in your hands.” Then he gave him a tenth of the whole’.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

ealles teoðan sceat Abraham *sealde*
godes bisceope. [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2100b–2120a)⁴⁰

In the Vulgate, Melchisedech is shown in his religious role, both through his actions – the offering of bread and wine – and through his words of blessing. Abraham's victory is mentioned, but only as evidence of his blessedness, which is the true topic of the speech, emphasised through the *benedictus* anaphora.

The Old English poem retains the religious dimension, but it is no longer central. Melchisedech's status as a bishop is no longer the key to his behaviour, but merely one epithet among three. As for Melchisedech's blessing, it is removed from the speech itself and duplicated after it so that it is no longer the issue at stake. Rather, it has been turned into a rhetorical device (an envelope pattern, see italics) whose function is to give prominence to another issue – Abraham's military victory. The theme of warfare is developed considerably and the references to God, while still present, have changed in nature: God is no longer a creator but a protector and a powerful ally. The passage is thus secularised and 'martialised', but it is not transformed into a secular ritual: there is no greeting in the speech (though it is mentioned in the narrative) and no vocative either. In fact, much of the speech is taken up by an evocation of battle, which is more narrative than interactive. Clearly, the poet is inspired by the heroic tradition, but they show more interest in battles than in ceremony.

Supernatural Institutions

In Old English poetry, human institutions are mirrored in the supernatural world.⁴¹ God and Satan are commonly represented as lords surrounded by their thanes. However, supernatural courts do not display pomp comparable to that shown in Heorot. Neither the evocation of the Last Judgement in *Christ and Satan* (610–27) nor that of God in majesty surrounded by angels in *Elene* (725–58) include a representation of etiquette or of subordinates carrying out essential functions for their leader. The lord–thane relationship is exploited mostly

⁴⁰ 'With him came the guardian of Salem's treasure, the great Melchisedech, the *bishop* of the people. He came *with presents*, the leader of warriors, to greet Abraham beautifully and honourably and he *gave him God's blessing* and said thus: "You were honoured in the reckoning of men for that in the sight of the one who granted you the glory of spears in battle! ... They were left dead in the track of the retreating army, the troop was unable to win the battle, but they were put to flight by God, he who, in the fight among the princes, had to threaten the superior force with his hands, and also by the holy covenant with the guardian of heaven that you hold faithfully." Then the man *gave him the gift of blessing with his hand* and Abraham *gave to the bishop of God* one-tenth of all the treasure.'

⁴¹ On this topic, see Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden*.

for its emotional potential: it is the paradigm of true love (*agapè* rather than *éros*) for all relationships, whether between spouses or between God and his creatures.⁴²

In general, God is represented as all-powerful and therefore as capable of carrying out his will without the assistance of subordinates. When angels do act as intermediaries, they do not always behave as representatives. In *Genesis A*, angels speak like God and seem to share his authority. When they negotiate with Lot the conditions of his flight from Sodom (2498b–2534), for instance, they do not need to consult their lord to take decisions. Similarly, the angel dealing with Hagar apparently offers his own word as a guarantee:

Hire þa se engel andswarode:
'... Þu scealt, Agar, Abrahame sunu
on woruld bringan. Ic þe wordum nu
minum secge, þæt se magorinc sceal
mid yldum wesan Ismahel haten. (*Genesis A*, 2280–8)⁴³

In that, the poem is true to the source, which actually gives the impression that the angel is the one who will grant Hagar her wish:

dixitque ei angelus Domini ... multiplicabo semen tuum et non numerabitur prae multitudine (Gen. XVI.9–10)⁴⁴

It is unlikely that the angel is meant to be seen as an autonomous agent. What Hagar hears is more probably God's voice, conveyed through a messenger. In this sense, the angel is not a representative of God but an extension of his power and physical presence.

The situation is quite different in *Guthlac A*. There, the angel has a specific identity and speaks as a representative of God and not as God himself.⁴⁵

Eom ic þara twelfa sum þe he getreoweste
under monnes hiw mode gelufade.
He mec of heofonum hider onsende,
geseah þæt ge on eorðan fore æfstum
on his wergengan wite legdon.
Is þæt min broþor, mec his bysgu gehreaw.
Ic þæt gefremme, þær se freond wunað
on þære socne, þe ic þa sibbe wið hine

⁴² See for example the way Sarah's husband is described as her lord in *Genesis A* (2227a, 2245a and 2783b–2784a) or how saints address God (*Juliana*, 153–7; *Guthlac A*, 637–44).

⁴³ 'Then the angel answered her: "You shall bear a son for Abraham, Hagar. I give you my word now that the young warrior shall be called Ishmael among men."'

⁴⁴ 'And the angel of the lord told her: "I will multiply your posterity and it will be too numerous to count."'

⁴⁵ *Guthlac's* rescuer is the apostle Saint Bartholomew, who acts as God's messenger. He is presented as an angel (*engel*) throughout the poem.

Direct Speech in *Beowulf*

healdan wille, nu ic his helpa mot,
þæt ge min onsynn oft sceawiað.
Nu ic his geneahhe neosan wille;
seal ic his word ond his weorc in gewitnesse
dryhtne lædon. He his dæde conn. (*Guthlac A*, 709–21)⁴⁶

The angel starts by introducing himself and his function,⁴⁷ not unlike the coastguard and Wulfgar in *Beowulf*. Interestingly enough, demons posing as angels behave in the same way in *Genesis B* (496b–521 and 551b–587) and *Juliana* (261–6). The self-introduction of the demon disguised as an angel is especially noteworthy in *Genesis B*.⁴⁸ The poem's source is Saxon, not Latin, and it seems to follow the codes of heroic poetry quite closely in its depiction of character relationships.⁴⁹ Adam's reference to a sign or token from God (540b, *tacen*) seems to point to a protocol that the audience was expected to know, whether from actual practice or from poetic convention. Here again, there is a hint of the kind of etiquette represented in *Beowulf*, but it is only a hint.

As such, it seems that there are traces of an interest in ceremony outside *Beowulf*, so that the poem need not be considered 'abnormal' in that respect, but these traces are so minimal that they can have no responsibility for the 'undramatic' quality attributed to Old English poetic speeches.

Public Speeches

While a general taste for ceremony is doubtful, it is undeniable that all poems show a preference for public speeches delivered by figures of authority. Once again, the importance of such speeches in a given poem depends partly on factors outside the poet's control: translators need

⁴⁶ 'I am one of the twelve that he loved with his soul as most faithful when he had a human form. He sent me here from heaven; he saw that on earth out of envy you were inflicting torments on his charge. He is my brother and his affliction moved me. I will do this, that as long as this friend remains in this sanctuary I will keep my friendship with him and you will often see my face, now that I may help him. From now on I want to visit him often; I will convey his words and deeds to the lord as a witness. He will know of his action.'

⁴⁷ He does not provide his actual name, but the intended audience would probably have identified him as St Bartholomew straightaway as that figure was closely associated with Guthlac's legend. It is already the case in Felix's eighth-century *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, but the theme is developed further in later sources. See Jones, 'Ghostly Mentor, Teacher of Mysteries'.

⁴⁸ In *Juliana*, the self-introduction is brief and adds very little to the elements already present in the source.

⁴⁹ Not all critics agree on the depth of the heroic dimension in *Genesis B*: Lucas sees it as crucial ('Loyalty and Obedience in the Old English *Genesis*', p. 121) whereas Doane (*The Saxon Genesis*, p. 131) and Stévanovitch (*La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, vol. 1, p. 189) are more circumspect. Still, even they acknowledge that the representation of Satan is modelled on the codes of heroic poetry.

to take their sources into account and certain plots lend themselves better than others to the representation of public and authoritative speeches.

Generally speaking, characters with low social or spiritual status rarely have their words represented directly, unless they act as representatives of another power. The only true exception to that trend concerns the representation of collective speeches: the individuals constituting the crowd are not necessarily distinguished in any way, but when they act as one they seem to gain a peculiar status. In a sense, they represent society at large rather than a sum of individuals and this probably explains why they are allowed to speak when individuals of comparable status rarely are.⁵⁰

As for public speeches, apart from *Genesis B* whose cast is necessarily limited, the poems without a Latin source all tend to show relatively high proportions. *Beowulf* is the most striking example with 87 per cent of public speeches, but *Guthlac A* and *Christ and Satan* are not far behind with 82 and 76 per cent respectively.⁵¹ *Guthlac A* is a particularly instructive case: whereas *Guthlac B*, which is directly adapted from chapter 50 of Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, focuses on private and even intimate scenes, *Guthlac A*, likely an original poem, privileges public confrontations between the saint and his numerous enemies.⁵²

Poems translated from the Latin show varying proportions: public speeches are relatively rare in *Genesis A* (17 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, in *Juliana* (37 per cent), but very common in *Andreas* (65 per cent) and *Elene* (83 per cent).⁵³ What is interesting, though, is that in a certain number of cases Old English translations stress the public nature of speeches more than their sources. In *Genesis A*, the poet often stays close to the Vulgate, for instance in the scene when Abimelech grants

⁵⁰ Hagar in *Genesis A* constitutes a rare example of a character with a low social status and a speaking part. The significance of that exception is doubtful, however. Hagar is an important character in the source, and could hardly be ignored in a relatively faithful translation, while her status as a biblical figure might compensate for her relatively low social standing in the eyes of the audience.

⁵¹ There are 39 out of 45 in *Beowulf*, 9 out of 11 in *Guthlac A*, and 16 out of 21 in *Christ and Satan*. I considered speeches 'public' when they were spoken to a crowd, by a crowd or in front of a crowd. In some cases the presence of a crowd is stated explicitly in the speech itself or just before, but not systematically (in which case it can be deduced from the context). If only explicitly public speeches are taken into account, *Beowulf*, *Guthlac A* and *Christ and Satan* still show some of the highest proportions with respectively 60%, 82% and 48% (27 out of 45, 9 out of 11, and 10 out of 21). The figures presented here are as accurate as possible but, in some cases, whether a speech is public or not and whether that status is made explicit or not can be open to interpretation.

⁵² On the sources of the two *Guthlac* poems, see Roberts, *The Guthlac Poems of the Exeter Book*, pp. 19–29 and 36–43.

⁵³ There are 9 out of 62 speeches in *Genesis A*, 11 out of 30 in *Juliana*, 44 out of 68 in *Andreas*, and 33 out of 40 in *Elene*. If only explicitly public speeches are taken into account, then the proportions are as follows: *Genesis A*, 5% (3 out of 62); *Juliana*, 23% (7 out of 30); *Andreas*, 28% (19 out of 68); and *Elene*, 45% (18 out of 40).

gifts to Abraham and Sarah, where the audience is not reminded of the presence of Abimelech's advisors or servants. When the poet handles the source more freely, however, the public nature of a speech may be stressed, as in the case of the war of the kings, where the phrase *for eorlum* ('in front of the men') is introduced before Abraham's speech (2136–8).

Similar phrases occur in *Andreas* (*fore þam heremægene*, 'in front of the warlike force', 728b), *Juliana* (*on wera mengu*, 'in front of the multitude of men', 45b) and especially *Elene* (*for eorlum*, 'in front of the noble-men', 332b, 404b, 417a, 620a and 1197a; *for herigum*, 'in front of the troops', 406a; *for weorodum*, 'in front of the multitudes', 351a). None of them translates an element already present in the source. The fact that similar phrases occur in original poems such as *Beowulf* (*fore þæm werede*, 'in front of the multitude', 1215b; *ofer ealle*, 'in front of them all', 2899b) and *Christ and Satan* (*ofer ealle*, 627b) tends to confirm the hypothesis that they might be a conventional feature of Old English poetry.

It is striking, though, that the poem where such phrases are most common should be *Elene* rather than *Beowulf*. Perhaps Cynewulf was overcompensating to make his poem sound more archaic than it really was, as part of his strategy to represent *Elene* as a true poetic hero. The overuse of *for eorlum* could then be compared to the frequent (but not always appropriate) use of *maþelode*: a sign not of direct continuity with a potentially older poetic tradition, but rather of a conscious imitation of a tradition already too distant to be fully mastered. The hypothesis can only be tentative, but it would suggest that Cynewulf perceived public speeches as a characteristic feature of Old English poetry at its most traditional.

Whether or not those phrases act as 'markers of traditionality', it is undeniable that they can change the import and meaning of a given speech. Thus *Juliana*'s rejection of *Eleusius* *on wera mengu* turns a personal rejection into a political gesture of rebellion against a character who is presented as the most powerful man in the area. That *Juliana*'s public gesture is meant to be interpreted as an insult that cannot go unanswered (comparable to *Unferth*'s attack on *Beowulf*'s reputation) is made clear when *Eleusius* reports the event to *Juliana*'s father.

Me þa fraceðu sind
on modsefan mæste weorce,
þæt heo mec swa torne tæle gerahte
fore þissum folce (*Juliana*, 71b–74a)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ 'Those insults pain my soul all the more as she plagued me with such distressing words in front of these people'.

That example is relatively atypical in the corpus, however. In religious poems, public speeches rarely have a political dimension. The difference does not lie exclusively in the speeches themselves but also in the nature of their audience. Consider this depiction of the audience just before Hrothgar starts speaking about Grendel's severed hand:

Eode scealc monig
swiðhicgende to sele þam hean
searowundor seon; swylce self cyning
of brydbure, beahhorda weard,
tryddode tirfæst getrume micle,
cystum gecyþed, ond his cwen mid him
medostigge mæt mægpa hose. (*Beowulf*, 918b–924)⁵⁵

The people mentioned are unnamed but not undifferentiated: the main components of Hrothgar's court are all evoked in turn. What is represented is not a mere crowd but rather royal power itself.

In religious poems, by contrast, crowds are usually undifferentiated,⁵⁶ to the point that they may speak with a single voice. Their function in the text is thus rather different. In hagiographic poems especially, crowds are often represented and they matter more for their number than for their social status. They may come and go without warning, every time witnesses or helpers are needed. The discovery of the True Cross offers one of the most obvious examples: Judas needs a miracle to authenticate the Cross and all at once a crowd appears, supplying not only the corpse that will test the power of the Cross, but also the requisite witnesses that will vouch for it.⁵⁷

Whereas in *Beowulf* the crowds represent the unity of the nation gathered under the leadership of the royal couple, in hagiographic poems they are masses to impress and convert. The conversion – i.e. the change of allegiance – of pagan crowds is indeed one of the major

⁵⁵ 'Many soldiers, determined, went to the lofty hall to see that wonder; likewise, the glorious king himself, the guardian of treasure, known for his virtues, walked out of the royal chamber surrounded by a great company, and with him went his queen on the way to the mead hall with a group of young girls.' Similar depictions occur elsewhere in the poem: 356–9, 1311b–1320 and 1644–50.

⁵⁶ See *Andreas*, 706–9a, 727–8 and 761–2 (Jesus performs miracles in the temple), 1554–72a, 1583–4a, 1595b–1608, 1636–61a and 1706–22 (final scenes of repentance and bliss); *Elene* 153–93 (Constantine and his advisors), 276–418 and 536–97 (Elene and the wise men), 619–20 (Elene and Judas in front of several people), 842b–899 (discovery of the true Cross); *Juliana*, 47b–88 (first rejection of Eleusius), 158–233a and 559–669a (public torments); *Genesis A*, 2136–38 (Abraham in front of the kings of Sodom and Salem and their men) and 2453–66 (Lot facing an angry crowd). In *Guthlac A* and *Christ and Satan*, crowds are all the more undifferentiated as they are either demonic legions or saints united through communion: *Guthlac A*, 140b–721 (demonic temptations); *Christ and Satan*, 51–74 and 224–80a (demonic laments), 380b–511 (Harrowing of Hell) and 597–641 (Last Judgement).

⁵⁷ In that, the poem is not different from the Latin source.

plot developments in those poems. In that sense, it is not just the individuals making up the crowds who are devoid of any identity, subsumed as they are in a greater, apparently homogeneous whole. The crowds themselves are featureless. They are merely blank pages waiting to be assimilated to one of the two paradigms on offer: on the one hand, the demons and damned souls who turned their backs on God, deprived of hope for ever, and on the other, the angels and saved souls who live in bliss.

Private Speeches

The correlate of the predominance of public speeches is the rarity of private or intimate conversations. Again, this is especially true of *Beowulf*. Only very few speeches are not pronounced in the hearing of a large group of people: Wealhtheow's speech to Hrothgar (1169–87),⁵⁸ the last survivor's speech (2247–66) and the last words exchanged by Beowulf and Wiglaf (2729–816). There is something intimate about those speeches, but there is always also much else besides. The emotion in Wealhtheow's words, for instance, is clearly perceptible. However, it is not certain that that emotion only belongs to the private sphere. Traditionally, the queen is interpreted by critics as a pathetic figure, condemned to witness the betrayal of her sons without being able to do anything about it in a world dominated by men. She is thus considered a type of the 'sad lady' (*geomuru ides*), best represented by Hildeburh.⁵⁹ As late as 2003, Orchard writes:

It is surely no coincidence that when Wealhtheow eventually speaks, first to Hrothgar (lines 1169–87), then to Beowulf (lines 1216–31), in both cases making what history was to prove a fruitless attempt to secure the succession for her sons, neither of those addressed actually answers. Wealhtheow, like Hildeburh, is a passive onlooker in a much wider and more vicious game; and it is to such victims that the *Beowulf*-poet persistently draws our attention.

... Wealhtheow knows none of this, of course: maternal concern alone shines through this rather crude attempt to meddle in high politics, and immediately after this speech, Wealhtheow heads straight for her sons (lines 1188–91).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ The speech is pronounced in the hall, but the text suggests that it is only heard by Hrothgar and those close to him: Hrothulf and Unferth.

⁵⁹ On that stereotype in Old English literature, see Hill, 'Dæt wæs *geomuru ides*!' and Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 181 and 220. As shown above (Chapter 1, 'Isolated Speeches'), speeches without a spoken answer are actually fairly common in *Beowulf* (and in other poems); in 1965, Sisam already noted: 'A modern reader may feel it to be ominous that nobody answers her; but the explanation is that *Beowulf* has none of the quick exchanges that make dialogue, and speeches in reply would have broken the thread here (*The Structure of Beowulf*, p. 38). According to Hill, the acceptance

For some years, however, several elements on which that type of interpretation relies have been called into question. While it is undeniable that the poem alludes to a dark future for the Danes on several occasions, Hrothulf's role in those events is not so clear.⁶¹ If he is innocent, then there can be no dramatic irony in Wealhtheow's words. Furthermore, it is reductive to see Wealhtheow as a mother talking to her husband on a family matter. Her speech reacts to Hrothgar's public decision to accept Beowulf as a son (946b–947): it is concerned with the succession to the throne and is therefore eminently political.⁶² This does not mean that there is nothing personal or emotional to the issue. The emotion is there, but it concerns matters larger than the nuclear family, which is itself a potentially anachronistic concept:

The intricacies of emotion and motivation involved in a powerful medieval Scandinavian queen's relationship with her sons, though not entirely reconstructable for us, must include cultural presuppositions about interpersonal relationships and about history and destiny quite alien to our own.⁶³

The same mix of personal emotion and public import is noticeable in Beowulf's last words. While Beowulf addresses Wiglaf affectionately (*Wiglaf leofa*, 'dear Wiglaf', 2745a), he is not speaking as a relative or as a friend but as a king concerned with his legacy. In fact, except for a few remarks (the orders to get the treasure and to build a barrow), Beowulf's words are not directed to Wiglaf at all. The young man is at best a spokesman and a witness, at worst a mere pretext, whose

of the cup offered by the queen in turn to Hrothgar and Beowulf is in itself tantamount to a commitment: see *The Cultural World in Beowulf*, pp. 79 and 101–3, as well as 'Social Milieu', p. 262. Hill's argument draws on Magennis, 'The Beowulf Poet and His *Druncne Dryhtguman*', pp. 161–4; Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, pp. 75–9; and Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, pp. 166–7.

⁶¹ Shortly before Wealhtheow's speech, the poem reads *þa gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere, / æghwylc oðrum trywe* ('then their relationship was still intact, each was faithful to the other', 1164b–1165a). Klaeber (*Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, pp. xxxi–ii) and many others interpret that passage and several others (1017–19, 1162–5 and 1228–31 as well as *Widsith* 45–6) as evidence of Hrothulf's future betrayal. Sisam (*The Structure of Beowulf*, pp. 34–9) was the first to question the reliability of *Widsith* and Norse analogues to support that hypothesis, and his view has been accepted and developed by others: Morgan, 'The Treachery of Hrothulf'; Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition*, p. 174; Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition*, p. 20; Mitchell, 'Literary Lapses', pp. 10–4; Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic*, pp. 71–3; Cooke, 'Hrothulf'; and Drout, 'Blood and Deeds', p. 219 and following. See Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, p. 177.

⁶² On Wealhtheow's political role, especially as a 'peace-weaver', see Sklute, 'Freoðuwebbe in Old English Poetry'; Bloomfield, 'Diminished by Kindness'; and Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf*, pp. 101–3. See also Klein, *Ruling Women*, pp. 87–124 and especially 119–20; Olsen, 'Gender Roles'; and Fee 'Beag & Beaghröden'.

⁶³ Bloomfield, 'Diminished by Kindness', p. 194.

presence offers Beowulf an opportunity to deliver his own epitaph.⁶⁴ The true addressee is not an individual but a group: Beowulf's people, to whom those words are meant to be repeated, but also the audience of the poem, for whom Beowulf's reign supposedly occurred 'in *geard-agum*' and who constitute therefore the posterity with whose opinion the hero is so concerned.⁶⁵

In hagiographic poetry and *Christ and Satan*, speeches without a large audience are more common, but few of them are truly private or intimate. Poems tend to focus more on the saints' missionary role than on their personal spiritual evolution. Even when that aspect is present, it tends to be treated as a public event. Thus the sanctity of the protagonist is often made manifest by the massive conversion of a crowd.⁶⁶ Even temptation scenes in a prison or a desert tend to resemble public confrontations. The only exception to that trend concerns debates over theological knowledge: between Juliana and the demon (289–530a), Andreas and the pilot (557–642), Judas and his father (436–531a) and perhaps Elene and Judas (598–690).⁶⁷ For once, the absence of a public is not merely a background fact but an essential element: those scenes insist on the secret and even occult nature of the knowledge conveyed, in a manner unparalleled in the sources.

In *Juliana*, that theme is touched on rather lightly. The poem merely insists rather more than its source on the fact that the demon must reveal absolutely all its secrets, from the beginning to the end (352–5a, 465–8a). In *Elene*, it is much more prevalent. Judas's father and grandfather are described as wise old men (*frod fyrnwiota*, 'wise and old advisor', 438a; *ealdum æwitán*, 'old man with knowledge of the law', 455a; *frod on fyrhðe*, 'wise in spirit', 463a; *guma gehðum frod*, 'man made wiser by his sorrows', 531a) who master a knowledge referred to as *leoðorune* ('counsel / secret in verse', 522b) and *soðcwíðum* ('words of

⁶⁴ Harris uses that word to designate 'a defense of his reputation or a self-justification' rather than a mere retrospective look on one's past ('Beowulf's Last Words', p. 16).

⁶⁵ Wiglaf actually repeats part of that speech later on (3077–100). More generally, formulas based on *ic gefrægn* ('I have heard say') represent the narrative as the result of an oral transmission, which as regards Beowulf's last words can only have one source – Wiglaf. His presence in the scene thus helps to reinforce the fiction of a tale based on true experience passed on from generation to generation. On that formula, see Greenfield, 'The Authenticating Voice in *Beowulf*', especially pp. 99–100; Parks, 'The Traditional Narrator and the "I heard" Formulas in Old English Poetry'; and Stévanovitch, 'Les formules éloquent la transmission orale de l'information dans *Beowulf*'.

⁶⁶ In *Guthlac A*, it is replaced by another external phenomenon: the transformation of the saint's retreat into a 'pleasant place' (*locus amoenus*). On that topos, see Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, pp. 142–7.

⁶⁷ The status of the conversation between Elene and Judas is somewhat problematic: at first, the poem stresses the fact that Elene is speaking to Judas alone (599, 603–4), but then she is said to speak in public (619–20). In the same poem, the wise man's advice to Elene concerning the nails (1167–95) and perhaps also the initial scene between Constantine and the angel (79–94a) may belong to the same paradigm of transmission of hidden knowledge.

truth', sometimes also 'sayings', 530a). The assembly of wise men also refers to Judas's story as something very secret (*swa dygle*, 541a), which must be handled with wisdom, cunning and caution (543–5) and then again as a secret truth that can be revealed entirely, and in the right order, if someone asks the right questions (588b–590). Taken altogether, those words seem to refer to ancient knowledge transmitted from generation to generation in a versified form, i.e. to gnomic poetry.

If gnomic poetry is not unknown in the Latin world, there was no allusion to it in the *Passio Iulianae* or the *Inventio sanctae crucis*. The changes effected by Cynewulf seem to betray an interest in the transmission of wisdom within the framework of an oral tradition. One may also wonder if they are not the sign of a difficulty to conceive of a private speech as anything else than an exchange of *run* ('whisper', and from there 'secret' or 'counsel').

The same tendency is noticeable in *Andreas*. The pilot prefaces his questions to the saint in this way:

Saga, þances gleaw þegn, gif ðu cunne (*Andreas*, 557)⁶⁸

Miht ðu me gesecgan, þæt ic soð wite (*Andreas*, 603)⁶⁹

Miht ðu, wis hæleð, wordum gesecgan (*Andreas*, 624)⁷⁰

The first of those questions has an equivalent in the source, but the two others are clear additions.⁷¹ The way they are phrased is rather typical of gnomic dialogues and riddles:

Saga ðu me, Salomon cyning, sunu Dauides (*Solomon and Saturn*, 354)⁷²

Saga, þoncol mon (*Riddle 2*, 12b)⁷³

Rece, gif þu cunne,
wis worda gleaw, hwæt sio wiht sie (*Riddle 32*, 13b–14)⁷⁴

Secge se þe cunne,
wisfæstra hwylc, hwæt seo wiht sy (*Riddle 67*, 15b–16)⁷⁵

⁶⁸ 'Tell me, thane wise in mind, if you know'.

⁶⁹ 'Can you tell me, so that I may know the truth'.

⁷⁰ 'Can you, wise man, convey by your words'.

⁷¹ The nearest equivalent passage in the *recensio casanatensis* (§ 10) reads *Nunc autem declara eas mihi tu discipule eius, qui cum eo fuisti et sicut vidisti* ('Now then, show them to me, you who were his disciple, who were with him and saw how it was') and in the *Praxeis Andreou*, according to Boenig's translation, 'O Andrew, disciple of this Jesus, tell me why' (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 7).

⁷² 'Tell me, king Solomon, son of David'.

⁷³ 'Tell me, thinker'.

⁷⁴ 'Say, if you know, wise one gifted with words, what that thing is'.

⁷⁵ 'Let the one who knows say, anyone among the wise, what that thing is'.

Those questions may not correspond to a formula in the strictest sense,⁷⁶ but they do fit a recognisable pattern associating a *verbum dicendi* and a reference to the addressee as a wise person or a questioning of the extent of their wisdom. Analogues of that pattern may be found in Old Norse poetry. In *Alvíssmál*, each of Thor's questions starts thus:

Segðu mér þat, Alvíss – öll of roç fira
voromc, dvergr, at vitir – (*Alvíssmál*, § 11, 1–2)⁷⁷

Vafðrúðnismál occasionally shows more variety, as seen from those two passages:

Segðu þat iþ eina, ef þitt æði dugir
oc þú, Vafðrúðnir, vitir (*Vafðrúðnismál*, § 20, 1–2)⁷⁸

Segðu þat iþ þriðia, allz þic svinnan qveða
oc þú, Vafðrúðnir, vitir (*Vafðrúðnismál*, § 24, 1–2)⁷⁹

In those two poems, the action is set in a hall. In that, they are comparable to several instances of *senna*. However, whereas the presence of an audience is crucial to the verbal confrontations of *Beowulf* and *Locasenna*, in *Alvíssmál* and *Vafðrúðnismál*, no third party is mentioned. In the latter, the giant actually invites his opponent to sit on the same bench (§ 19), which suggests some proximity, and perhaps some intimacy, quite unlike typical *sennur*.⁸⁰

It seems likely that the gnomic dialogue constitutes a rare vernacular model for private conversation. Its focus on truth and potentially mysterious or sacred matters makes it particularly attractive to Old English hagiographers, who use it to represent the spiritual debates in their sources. As a result, the text is not only translated into another language but also into another cultural paradigm, while the meaning is potentially altered. In the Greek and Latin versions of Saint Andrew's legend, the conversation between the saint and the pilot is represented as a scene of temptation. The saint is submitted to intense questioning, so much so that he ends up complaining of the harsh treatment.⁸¹ In

⁷⁶ According to Parry, 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' ('Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I', p. 80).

⁷⁷ 'Tell me that, All-Wise, I expect you to know everything, dwarf, about the fate of men'. The same is repeated in stanzas 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 and 33.

⁷⁸ 'Tell me this first thing, if your mind proves useful and you, Vafthrudnir, know'.

⁷⁹ 'Tell me this third thing, since you are said to be wise and you, Vafthrudnir, know'.

⁸⁰ Several *sennur* actually manifest the distance between the opponents very visibly, showing them on opposite sides of a body of water (in *Hárbarðsljóð* and in *Battle of Maldon* in particular).

⁸¹ In Boenig's translation of the *Praxeis Andreou* (*The Acts of Andrew*), the complaint reads 'O man who has the spirit of questioning, why do you try me?' and, in the *recensio casanat-*

the Old English poem, the notion of temptation has disappeared and the complaint has become an expression of wonder and puzzlement at an interlocutor who is evidently more than he appears:

Hwæt frinest ðu me, frea leofesta,
wordum wrætlicum, ond þe wyrda gehwære
purh snyttra cræft soð oncnawest? (*Andreas*, 629–31)⁸²

Temptation is a spiritual and psychological issue. The character's doubts are externalised and given physical presence in the person of the questioner, but they are what matters. In a test of wisdom, that psychological dimension is largely absent. What matters is not what the character's mind is experiencing but how much knowledge it contains. In both cases the conversation is private, but the connotation is quite different: in the Greek and Latin texts, privacy is associated with intimacy and inner thoughts, whereas in Old English it is associated with secrecy and arcane knowledge.

The two *Genesis* poems are quite atypical in that most of their speeches are private. Moreover, they often represent conversations between close ones on deeply emotional matters: see for example Sarah complaining to Abraham about Hagar (*Genesis A*, 2247–55 and 2783b–2791a) or Adam blaming Eve for her ill-advised choice (*Genesis B*, 791–820). Nothing suggests discomfort on the part of the Old English and Old Saxon poets: the *Genesis A* poem actually expands on the Vulgate in those scenes, whereas *Genesis B* follows faithfully its Saxon source, which is largely original.⁸³ In both poems, emotions run high. See for example this speech of Sarah:

eice ancillam hanc et filium eius non enim erit heres filius ancillae cum
filio meo Isaac (Gen. XXI.10)⁸⁴

Forgif me, beaga weard,
min swæs frea, hat siðian
Agar ellor and Ismael
lædan mid hie! Ne beoð we leng somed
willum minum, gif ic wealdan mot.
Næfre Ismael wið Isace,
wið min agen bearn yrfe dæleð

ensis, quam diu temptas me, 'how long you tempt me!' (§ 11). In the *recensio casanatensis*, the notion of temptation is made explicit earlier, with this inquit: *Tunc dominus iesus temptans eum dixit*, 'Then the lord Jesus said to tempt him' (§ 10).

⁸² 'Why do you question me, beloved lord, with wondrous words, when you know the truth concerning each of those events through the strength of your understanding?'

⁸³ For a detailed comparison of the Old Saxon and the Old English versions of this passage, see Doane, *The Saxon Genesis*, pp. 55–64.

⁸⁴ 'Drive this maid and her son away. For the son of a maid shall not inherit with my son Isaac'.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

on laste þe, þonne þu of lice
aldor asendest. (*Genesis A*, 2783b–2791a)⁸⁵

The Vulgate represents a class conflict between Sarah and those she considers lower in the social hierarchy (*ancillam hanc*, ‘this servant’; *filius ancillae*, ‘the servant’s son’). By contrast, the Old English Sarah focuses on personal relationships: Ishmael and Hagar are called by name and Isaac is designated as Sarah’s own child (*agen bearn*), whose father is a ‘guardian of rings’ (*beaga weard*), but also her ‘sweet lord’ (*swæs frea*). This is probably as close as Old English poetry gets to a ‘domestic’ conversation.

Yet there is no true ‘domestic’ paradigm. The absence of an audience is a fact of the situation, derived from the source, but it receives no emphasis. The poet seems to have no conventional formulas at hand to evoke an intimate setting. There is no unease with the representation of emotion, true enough, but then again personal emotion is not restricted to the private sphere in Old English poetry: see for example Hrothgar embracing Beowulf as a son in front of everyone (946b–949a) or mourning his good friend and advisor Æschere (1322–44).⁸⁶

It seems likely, then, that the only true vernacular paradigm for private conversation in Old English verse is the exchange of secrets. However, the acceptability of the representation of emotions in public discourse probably made it easy for translators to innovate and represent ‘domestic’ scenes, perhaps less typical of Old English traditional verse.

As a conclusion, it is undeniable that the taste for ‘ceremonial dignity’ identified in *Beowulf* cannot be considered a typical feature of Direct Speech in Old English narrative poetry. On the other hand, it is equally clear that Old English poetry favours certain types of speeches in preference to others and that casual conversation in a private setting is not the dominant paradigm. Public speeches delivered by figures of authority seem to be the norm. Deviations from the norm are possible, of course, especially in the case of translations, but the trend is quite strong.

⁸⁵ ‘Grant me this, guardian of the rings, my sweet lord, and tell Hagar to go away and take Ishmael with her. We shall not live together any longer – this is my will, if I am allowed to rule on this. Never shall Ishmael share with Isaac, with my own child, in your inheritance when life will have left your body.’

⁸⁶ The absence of a strong connection between emotions and intimacy or solitude is also visible in the representation of prayers and laments, which are typically public to some extent in Old English poetry, whereas we tend to think of such acts as intrinsically solitary: Andreas prays in front of his disciples (897–909) and torturers (1281–95 and 1401–28); Judas presumably in front of Elene’s men (725–801 and 807–26); Juliana in front of the demon (272–782a); likewise Satan mourns his fate in front of many demons in *Genesis B* (356–441) and *Christ and Satan* (36b–188); and Beowulf deplores his lack of an heir in Wiglaf’s presence (2729–816).

The conventional presence of an internal audience whenever a speech is delivered may be connected to the typical conditions of reception of poetry in the Anglo-Saxon period. A modern reader, perusing a text in the silence and privacy of their own home, may imagine themselves as a fly on the wall, spying on the characters' private conversations. For a person accustomed to hearing poetry read aloud to a group, though, such a fantasy is probably less available. In that kind of setting, a speech is always already public to some extent.⁸⁷ It is worth noting, however, that the external audience is never directly addressed or acknowledged in the texts themselves.

Another aspect worth noting is the fact that Anglo-Saxon notions of 'private' and 'public' do not quite match our own. In modern Western societies, strong emotion is often seen as inappropriate outside the private sphere, but this does not seem to be the case in Anglo-Saxon culture. Conversely, we see knowledge as something to be shared and made public, whereas they apparently saw it as something exclusive and secret. As a consequence, one should be careful in the interpretation of Old English public speeches: the presence of an audience is often indisputable, but the connotations implied by that presence may not always so easily be intuited.

Inactive Speeches

Inactive Speeches in Beowulf

The notion that Direct Speech delays the progress of Old English verse narratives instead of carrying on the action was first developed in relation to *Beowulf*. As a consequence, the issues specific to that poem have largely informed the debate, perhaps unduly. Heusler first broached the topic in 1902, when he drew attention to an apparent contradiction between the poem's epic character and its wealth of 'contemplative' speeches ('beschaulich').⁸⁸ According to Heusler, the preference for such speeches over 'active' speeches ('handelnd') and the lack of Direct Speech in the three main fight scenes go against the conventions of classical epic, a deviation he ascribes both to the literary or 'bookish' nature of the Old English poem ('buchepos') and to the characteristics of the English soul, supposedly more inclined to melancholy.⁸⁹

Heusler's analysis shows the true scope of the issue: the 'active' status of speeches is intimately connected to our understanding of the poem's genre (is it epic or not and how literary is it?) and of its

⁸⁷ See Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*, p. 213.

⁸⁸ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', p. 218.

⁸⁹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 218–20.

aesthetic goal (what emotion is it meant to arouse in the audience?). Since Heusler, the matter has been hotly debated. Two main bones of contention stand out. The first one concerns the relation between the two 'parts' of the poem and the second one the role of digressions in it.

The first issue is raised particularly explicitly by Klaeber:

By far the most felicitous use of the element of discourse is made in the first part, especially in the earlier division of it, from the beginning of the action proper to the Grendel fight (189–709). The speeches occurring in it belong largely to the 'advancing' type, consist mainly of dialogue ... and are an essential factor in creating the impression of true epic movement. As the poem continues, the speeches increase in length and deliberation. The natural form of dialogue is in the last part completely superseded by addresses without answer, some of them being virtually speeches in form only.⁹⁰

Heusler had already noted that the 'preliminary' ('vorbereitend')⁹¹ speeches were more active than the others, but he included in that category the speeches occurring before all three main fights. In other words, for him there were three main exceptions to the contemplative norm, but no change of paradigm in the course of the poem. By contrast, Klaeber establishes a sharp distinction between the first part of the poem, considered truly epic, and the second part, in which dialogue is seen as denatured. That diagnosis must be read in the light of another: 'The poem of *Beowulf* consists of two distinct parts joined in a very loose manner and held together only by the person of the hero.'⁹² That comment shows that at the time Klaeber was writing, there were still some doubts concerning the unity of the poem.⁹³

Those doubts gradually cleared away, especially following Tolkien's influential paper entitled '*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*' (1936), but the perception of a major discrepancy between the first and the second half of the poem remained. In 1965, Leyerle argued that the contrast between those two parts betrayed a criticism of heroic society and its intrinsic flaws:

This theme is the fatal contradiction at the core of heroic society. The hero follows a code that exalts indomitable will and valour in the individual, but society requires a king who acts for the common good, not

⁹⁰ Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, p. lvi.

⁹¹ Heusler, 'Der Dialog in der altgermanischen erzählenden Dichtung', pp. 218–19.

⁹² Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, p. li.

⁹³ The unity of the poem was questioned by the proponents of the *Liedertheorie*, first among whom was Müllenhoff (1818–84). At the time Klaeber is writing, that theory is no longer dominant and most critics believe in a single authorship, but the cohesion and coherence of the text is still debated. See Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, pp. lxxix–xci; and Shippey, 'Structure and Unity'.

for his own glory. The greater the hero, the more likely his tendency to imprudent action as king.⁹⁴

That interpretation was retained and developed further by Georgianna, who saw in the increasingly melancholic and contemplative nature of speeches the sign of an indictment not just of heroic society, but also of the heroic genre itself, in which, according to her, no change is ever truly effected.⁹⁵

This type of approach has been criticised,⁹⁶ but it remains influential, for example in Orchard's *Critical Companion to Beowulf* (2003), in which the use of Direct Speech in the second half of the poem is judged rather harshly ('pouring out words into unresponsive emptiness is simply the norm in Part II of *Beowulf*').⁹⁷ Such interpretations need to be re-examined in a larger context, to ascertain whether contemplative speeches truly tend to be associated with ineffectiveness in Old English narrative poetry.

The second issue concerns the role of digressions and episodes. Out of the twenty-eight identified by Klaeber, many (thirteen) are introduced through Direct Speech, especially in the second half of the poem.⁹⁸ Once critics were convinced of the poem's unity, they tried to account for the function of those elements in the narrative.⁹⁹ Once again, Leyerle's approach proved very influential. In a paper published in 1967, he suggests that digressions should not be seen as divergences from a central narrative thread, but as part of a complex interlace structure:

The themes make a complex, tightly-knotted lacertine interlace that cannot be untied without losing the design and form of the whole. The tension and force of the poem arise from the way the themes cross and juxtapose. Few comments are needed from the poet because significance comes from the intersections and conjunctions of the design. To the *Beowulf* poet, as to many other writers, the relations between events are more significant than their temporal sequence ... Although the poem

⁹⁴ Leyerle, 'Beowulf the Hero and the King', p. 89.

⁹⁵ Georgianna, 'King Hrethel's Sorrow and the Limits of Action in *Beowulf*'.

⁹⁶ See in particular Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, p. 81: 'In such lead-footed moralizing attitudes, Leyerle betrays a crypto-Christian approach that cannot disguise its blanket disapproval of heroes as heroes, an approach that denies the worth of the poem's secular ideal.' The same remark could easily apply to Georgianna's paper as it adopts a religious and moral perspective and opposes the heroic genre's lack of true change to the possibility of salvation in Christian narratives.

⁹⁷ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 227.

⁹⁸ Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edn, p. liii–lv.

⁹⁹ See in particular Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf*. According to Bjork ('Digressions and Episodes'), among the episodes told through Direct Speech, three especially have been extensively studied by critics: Beowulf and Unferth's competing narratives (499–606), Beowulf's evocation of the Heathobards (2032–66) and the Last Survivor's Lament (2247–66).

Direct Speech in Beowulf

has to be lingered over and gives up its secrets slowly, the principle of its interlace structure helps to reveal the interwoven coherence of the episodes as well as the total design of the poem in all its complex resonances and reverberations of meaning. There are no digressions in *Beowulf*.¹⁰⁰

Subsequent studies have taken that idea further, suggesting that medieval texts – and texts under oral influence, more generally – do not strive to achieve overall consistency, but rather to create sharply contrasted episodes, which are loosely connected through a system of echoes and repetitions but which do not conform to a rigid and all-encompassing structure and which do not necessarily convey a fixed meaning.¹⁰¹ This phenomenon goes much beyond Direct Speech itself, but it is within that framework that ‘digressive’ speeches must be considered. It is also important to determine the extent to which *Beowulf* is atypical or not in the use of such ‘digressions’.

Commentaries outside Beowulf

Speeches that comment on the action or its consequences, instead of carrying it on, are especially widespread in *Beowulf*, but they are common in other Old English narrative poems as well. Even *Genesis A*, which follows its source quite closely, regularly adds such comments, as in the following passage:

qui ait vocem tuam audiui in paradiso et timui eo quod nudus essem et abscondi me (Gen. III.10)¹⁰²

Ic wreo me her wæda leasne,
liffrea min, leafum þecce.
Scyldfull mine sceaðen is me sare,
frecne on ferhðe; ne dear nu forð gan
for ðe andweardne. Ic eom eall eall nacod. [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 867–71)¹⁰³

Not only has the italicised passage no counterpart in the Vulgate, but it is given added emphasis through an envelope pattern based on the repetition of the theme of nakedness. Just like prayers and laments, such comments may be used to give access to the character’s inner

¹⁰⁰ Leyerle, ‘The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*’, p. 156.

¹⁰¹ See Stanley, ‘The Narrative Art of *Beowulf*’; Niles, *Beowulf: The Poem and Its Tradition*, especially pp. 163–76; Evans, ‘Episodes in Analysis of Medieval Narrative’; and Frantzen, *Desire for Origins and Writing the Unreadable Beowulf*.

¹⁰² ‘He said: “I heard your voice in the garden and I grew afraid because I am naked, so I hid.”’

¹⁰³ ‘I hide here, without clothes, my lord, cover myself with leaves. *My guilty conscience is a source of sorrow to me, horrible for my mind.* I dare not come forth in your presence. I am all naked.’

being. This potential is particularly valuable in a narrative tradition that does not allow for the thoughts of a character to be verbalised unless they are actually spoken out loud.¹⁰⁴

Occasionally, though, such comments are used to focus, not so much on the character's thoughts but rather on what they reveal of the actual situation. Beowulf's description by the coastguard is a famous case in point (237–51), but there are many other instances, for example in this extract from *Christ and Satan*:

'Pis is stronglic, nu þes storm becom,
þegen mid þreate, þeoden engla.
Him beforan fereð fægere leoht
þonne we æfre ær eagam gesawon,
buton þa we mid englum uppe wæron.
Wile nu ure witu þurh his wuldres cræft
eall toweorpan. Nu ðes egsa com,
dyne for drihtne, sceal þes dreorga heap
ungeara nu atol þrowian.
Hit is se seolfa sunu waldendes,
engla drihten. Wile uppe heonan
sawla lædan, and we seoððan a
þæs yrreweorces henðo gepoliað.' (*Christ and Satan*, 385–98)¹⁰⁵

In this text without any known Latin source, the 'active' part of speech is altogether missing. The speech provides a description of the Harrowing more detailed than the narrator's (378b–381) and some insight into Christ's intent. Clearly, the speech is not meant as a window onto the speaker's mind. Rather, the speaker is used as a medium to convey information on outside events and on other characters' intentions, such as can be guessed at from visible actions. In that, their function is not unlike the narrator's.

Using a character to convey such information has several advantages. First of all, the character has the authority of a direct witness. *Christ and Satan*'s narrator cannot claim to have witnessed the events described, whereas the demons were actually there. It matters all the more as Anglo-Saxon culture values oral testimony provided in person. In modern Western culture, oral testimony is frequently associated

¹⁰⁴ Focalisation is not strictly external as the narrator may relay the character's state of mind, but the thoughts of the character cannot be represented as a kind of internal speech. See Chapter 1, n. 46.

¹⁰⁵ 'It is very hard, now that this storm has come, a warrior surrounded with his troop, the prince of angels. Ahead of him comes a light fairer than any we have ever seen with our eyes, except when we were above with the angels. Now he wants to destroy our punishments with the might of his glory. Now this terror has come, a great din caused by the lord; now this miserable host must very soon now endure that horror. He is the son of the lord himself, the prince of angels. He intends to lead souls above from here and we shall always suffer the humiliation of this act of fury.'

with subjectivity, with a more human but also less accurate form of evidence. In Anglo-Saxon culture, on the other hand, oral testimony is seen as the best guarantee of truth.¹⁰⁶ There is no reason to think that the original audience of the poem would have been fooled by the narrative illusion of a direct witness, but it is likely that the idea of an ostensible direct witness would have appealed to them.

Second, the didactic ambition shared by most of the poems considered here is well served by the use of Direct Speech to convey information. It allows for the dramatic representation of the activity of interpretation and understanding and provides the audience with a model of how they should react:

In veritate, Christe, tu es Salvator mundi: gratias tibi ago Domine, qui cum sim indignus, non me fraudatis dono gratiæ tuæ. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 10)¹⁰⁷

Nu ic þurh soð hafu seolf gecnawen
on heardum hige þæt ðu hælend eart
middangeardes. Sie ðe, mægena god,
þrymsittendum þanc butan ende,
þæs ðu me swa meðum ond swa manweorcum
þurh þin wuldor inwrige wyrda geryno. (*Elene*, 807–12)¹⁰⁸

Whereas the Latin text only provides brute facts, the Old English poem focuses on the process that led the character to the truth in spite of his obstinacy. This device is used relatively often in Old English verse.¹⁰⁹ Here, it allows the poet to represent the character's thoughts, a first-hand testimony on a major miracle and an example of how a wise person should think.

Third, Direct Speech makes it possible to actualise remote events.¹¹⁰ In the extract from *Christ and Satan* quoted above, first-person markers, the demonstrative *þes* and the time adverb *nu*, repeated several times, contribute to promote the illusion that the action is going on right now, as the character (and the performer of the poem) speak(s). Interestingly enough, such actualisation is not necessary to make comments acceptable in Direct Speech. They may also be delivered in a style not so

¹⁰⁶ See Abraham, 'Cynewulf's *Juliana*'; Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word'; Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, pp. 157–61. However, Kelly's article shows that written testimony grows more important through the Anglo-Saxon period.

¹⁰⁷ 'In truth, Christ, you are the world's saviour: I give thanks to you, lord, who, even though I am unworthy, have not denied me the gift of your grace.'

¹⁰⁸ 'Now in truth I have understood myself in my obstinate mind that you are the world's saviour. To you be thanks for ever, god of armies, you who sit in glory, for having miraculously revealed the mystery of your actions to me who is weak and full of sins.'

¹⁰⁹ See Shippey, *Old English Verse*, p. 121.

¹¹⁰ On the notion of actualisation, see Introduction ('Direct Speech Reinterpreted').

different from the narrator's. Compare for example these two extracts, the first taken from a speech by Andreas's disciples and the second from *Christ and Satan's* narrative:

Swylce we gesegon for suna meotudes,
æðelum ecne, eowic standan,
twelfe getealde, tireadige hæleð.
Eow þegnodon þrymsittende,
halige heahenglas. Ðam bið hæleða well
þe þara blissa brucan moton.
Þær wæs wuldres wynn, wigendra þrym,
æðelic onginn, næs þær ænigum gewinn.
Þam bið wræcsið witod, wite geopenad,
þe þara gefeana sceal fremde weorðan,
hean hwearfian, þonne heonon gangaþ. (*Andreas*, 881–91)¹¹¹

Siteð him on heofnum halig encgel,
waldend mid witegum. Hafað wuldres bearn
his seolfes seld swegl betolden.
Leaðað us þider to leohte þurh his læcedom,
þær we moton seolfe sittan mid drihtne,
uppe mid englum, habban þæt ilce leoht,
þær his hired nu halig eardað,
wunað in wynnum, þær is wuldres bled
torht ontyned. Uton teala hycgan
þæt we hælende heran georne,
Criste cweman. Þær is cuðre lif
þonne we on eorðan mægen æfre gestreonan. (*Christ and Satan*,
585–96)¹¹²

Several markers allow the reader to realise that the first extract is a description of a specific moment in time, involving the addressee, whereas the second one is a general description, but both representations of heaven are equally remote. Clearly, actualisation is an additional option available to the poet, but it is not a necessary feature.

On the other hand, the use of comments in Direct Speech seems to be fairly systematic. It is difficult to quantify their presence as the frontier

¹¹¹ 'We also saw you standing in front of the Creator's son, gifted with noble qualities, in total twelve heroes honoured with victory. Holy archangels sitting in glory served you. For those who are allowed to enjoy such blessings, it will be well. There was glorious joy, the majesty of warriors, a noble attitude; there was no conflict. For those who become estranged from those joys, exile is ordained, torment is disclosed, to turn away, abject, when they leave this world.'

¹¹² 'The holy angel is sitting with him in the sky, the lord with his prophets. The glorious son has his throne surrounded with songs. He invites us through his salvation to the light there, where we will be able to sit with the lord ourselves, above with angels, to have the same light, where his holy court dwells now, resides in joy, where the reward of glory shines unhidden. We would do well to think of earnestly obeying the saviour, of satisfying Christ. There is a better life above than we can ever gain on earth.'

between 'active' and 'contemplative' parts of speech can be rather blurry, but the consistency with which translations add comments to their original material is a strong indicator of their conventionality. In other words, it would seem that for Anglo-Saxon poets, Direct Speech was not only a legitimate medium for commentary on the action, but actually required its presence.

Narrative 'Digressions' outside Beowulf

The use of 'digressions' – i.e. the interruption of the narrative flow with analepses or prolepses – is less systematic. One important reason for that is the fact that Anglo-Saxon translators frequently expand on their sources, but they rarely reorganise them completely. As a consequence, whenever a poem is based on a Latin source, its digressions reflect the source more surely than any potential Old English poetic convention.

As a matter of fact, the Latin sources of the poems in our corpus do contain digressions as well. However, they are not necessarily used in quite the same way as in original Old English poems. In all poems, the frequent use of digressions makes for a narrative that is both non-linear and repetitive.¹¹³ Additionally, the frequent recourse to prolepsis is apt to suggest that the story exists outside the text, as noted by Marnette concerning French *chansons de geste*:

L'emploi des prolepses, particulièrement au passé simple ... nous présente l'histoire comme étant immuable et pré-existant à la narration ou du moins comme en étant séparée. En bref, on constate une fois de plus que l'histoire existe en dehors de sa mise en récit par le narrateur : celui-ci la raconte mais ne la crée pas.¹¹⁴

Old English poetry does not use the simple past for prolepses, so the audience is not reminded quite so forcefully of the fact that 'future' events in the narrative have already happened. Still, allusions to events that are yet to unfold encourage the notion that those events are somehow outside the narrator's control – that they are already set in stone.

Different texts may exploit that potential in very different ways, however. For Bonjour, in *Beowulf* prolepses typically allude to future

¹¹³ The narrative may be repetitive either because the same event is alluded to several times through digressions (Bonjour mentions the example of the references to the fall of the Geats: *Beowulf*, 2911–14, 2921–2, 2999–3007 and 3021–7 in 'The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*', p. 19) or because the same event is told both as part of the main narrative and as a prolepsis or analepsis.

¹¹⁴ Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*, p. 84. 'The use of prolepses, especially in the simple past ... presents the story to us as if it were immutable and pre-existed narration, or at least as if it were separate from it. In other words, it appears once more that the story exists independently of its transformation into a narrative by the narrator: the narrator relates it, but does not create it.'

changes for the worse and their function is to highlight the transience of all earthly things:

Now this survey throws into light the fundamental character which perfectly unites all these allusive anticipations: the implication that everything in this world is transient, that, to use a leit-motiv of the poem, '*gyrn [cymed] æfter gomene*,' affliction after joy.¹¹⁵

Future events are not only outside the narrator's control but also outside the characters' control. The effect of prolepses in *Genesis A* (and in the Vulgate) is quite different. Most often, the speakers appear in control of the events they foretell and not as a victim of them. It is particularly true, of course, when the speaker is God. On several occasions, God foretells events to Noah or Abraham. God's omnipotence means that the prolepsis is then halfway between a prophecy and an actual promise. The prolepsis is no longer a symbol of transience and instability but, on the contrary, a sign of divine stability. Even when the speaker is not God, they seem to have a degree of control over the situation. Thus, Abraham foretells the trouble that his wife's beauty will cause the two of them (XII.11–13 and 1824–43) and subsequent events prove him right (XII.14–20 and 1844–72), but the measures he takes to ensure their protection prove effective and sufficient to counter the threat, so that he seems in full control of his fate.

In hagiographic poems derived from Latin sources, the protagonist's future torments are often foretold in one way or another.¹¹⁶ As the torment is necessary to refine the protagonist into a saint, the overall impression is again not of inescapable fate but rather of well-ordained providence. Original religious poems share the same confidence in divine stability, but they rarely foretell factual events on earth. Fate tends to be evoked in a more abstract way, often in connection with the Last Judgement, especially in *Guthlac A*.

Generally speaking, it is possible to notice some slight formal differences in the way that Latin sources and original Old English poems handle digressions. First, in Latin hagiographies, digressions in Direct Speech may be exceedingly long, to the point that the audience may temporarily forget about the main narrative,¹¹⁷ but the overall structure of the narrative is not destabilised. Digressions are rather like secondary narratives, clearly subordinated to the main one. They are sharply delineated and the same narrative thread only occurs once.

¹¹⁵ Bonjour, 'The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*', p. 19.

¹¹⁶ The feature appears as a warning in *Andreas* (950–9a and *recensio casanatensis*, § 18), as a threat in *Elene* (686–90 and *Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 8) and as defiance in *Juliana* (55–8), without any equivalent in the *Passio Iulianae*.

¹¹⁷ *Andreas*' retelling of Jesus' miracles (644–810 and *recensio casanatensis*, § 12–15) and Judas's account of his father's words (462–510 and *Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 6) are particularly striking instances.

Such digressions cannot be compared with the interlace pattern identified in *Beowulf*. A first series of action is interrupted with another series, but there is no true intermingling. They cannot compare with *Christ and Satan's* rather cavalier handling of chronology either. It is possible that the structure of *Christ and Satan* owes more to its peculiar form, akin to a homily interspersed with *exempla*,¹¹⁸ than to its status as an original Old English poem, but it does seem that maintaining a strict chronology was not a dominant concern for Anglo-Saxon poets.

Second, there might be a tendency of Old English digressions to be rather more allusive than their Latin counterparts, though the issue is not very clear-cut. At first sight, the many allusions to different stories in *Beowulf* seem very atypical. Their content certainly has little equivalent in the rest of the poetic corpus, except perhaps in poems such as *Deor* and *Widsith*. Their narrative technique, on the other hand, is not so distinctive. Compare the two following extracts:

Du scealt to frofre weorþan
eal langtwidig leodum þinum,
hæleðum to helpe. Ne wearð Heremod swa
eaforum Ecgwelan, Arscyldingum;
ne geweax he him to willan, ac to wælfæalle
ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum;
breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas,
ealgesteallan, oþþæt he ana hwearf,
mære þeoden, mondreamum from.
... dreamleas gebad
þæt he þæs gewinnes weorc þrowade,
leodbealo longsum. Ðu þe lær be þon,
gumcyste ongit (*Beowulf*, 1707b–1723a)¹¹⁹

Doð efne swa, gif eow dryhten Crist,
lifes leohtfruma lyfan wylle,
weoruda waldend, þæt ge his wergengan
in þone laðan leg lædan motan.
Þæt is in gewældum wuldorcyninges,
se eow gehynde ond in hæft bidraf
under nearone clom, nergende Crist.
... Ic þone deman in dagum minum
wille weorþian ...

¹¹⁸ See Finnegan, 'Christ and Satan: Structure and Theme'. The same analysis is also presented in Finnegan's edition of the poem, pp. 17–36.

¹¹⁹ 'You shall become a lasting support to your people, a help to men. Heremod did not turn out that way for the descendants of Ecgwela, the honourable Scyldings; his elevation did not lead to the satisfaction of their desires but to the fall and the pain of the Danish people; grown mad with rage, he destroyed his table companions, his closest comrades until, alone, he turned away, a famous prince, from human joys ... He lived without joy, so that he suffered from that conflict, from the long enmity of the people. Learn from this and perceive what makes the worth of a man'.

Sindon ge wærlogan, swa ge in wræcsiðe
longe lifdon, lege bisencte,
swearte beswicene, swegle benumene ...
Ge þa fægran gesceaft in fyrndagum,
gæstlicne goddream, gearo forsegon,
þa ge wiðhogdun halgum dryhtne. (*Guthlac A*, 592–631)¹²⁰

In the first extract, Hrothgar's reference to Heremod's story is very allusive and concerns events that happened long before the poem's timeline. The modern reader, who is unfamiliar with that particular tale, is given the impression of a door opening onto very mysterious (and largely inaccessible) territory. The poem as a whole may then appear as an open work, which, rather like Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*,¹²¹ offers tantalising hints of stories that could be. One may wonder, however, if a reader completely ignorant of monotheistic traditions would not feel the same way when reading the extract from *Guthlac A*. Here too, the event concerned occurred long before the timeline of the poem and is only alluded to in the vaguest terms. Both passages share the same interlace technique, alternating between references to the action required in the present situation and allusions to (negative) role models. In *Beowulf*, the device is used more subtly as the example of Heremod is only discussed once and the next reference to paradigmatic action is couched in more general terms (1728–57), but the technique is essentially the same.

Comparisons between Old English poems and their Latin sources allow us to distinguish more clearly the specificities of that technique. See for example this allusion to Judas's betrayal of Jesus:

Quis iterum hic est, qui non permittit me suscipere animas meorum? O Jesu Nazarene; omnes traxisti ad te: ecce & lignum tuum manifestasti adversum me. O Juda! quid hoc fecisti? Nonne prius ego per Iudam traditione perfeci, & populum concitavi impie agere? Ecce nunc per Iudam ego hinc ejicior. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 11)¹²²

¹²⁰ 'Do that indeed, if the lord Christ, the origin of light and life will let you, the master of troops, lead his servant into the hateful fire. It is within the power of the king of glory, he who led you into bondage, and drove you out in very tight chains, Christ the saviour ... I intend to honour the Judge in all the days of my life ... You are traitors, that is why you have lived so long in exile, deceived by darkness, deprived from the sky. Very long ago, you rejected the beautiful creation, the spiritual joy of God, when you opposed the holy lord.'

¹²¹ Calvino's work (1979) relates the misfortunes of a reader looking for a particular novel and is interspersed with the ten 'first chapters' of various fictitious novels that the reader encounters in his quest.

¹²² 'Who is this person who, for the second time, prevents me from taking souls away? O Jesus from Nazareth, you have drawn them all to you: and now you have revealed your Cross to oppose me. O Judas! Why have you done this? Did I not obtain, long ago, that Jesus be turned in through Judas and did I not incite the people to act impiously? And now through Judas I am expelled from here.'

Hwæt is þis, la, manna, þe minne eft
þurh fyrngeflit folgaþ wyrdeð,
iceð ealdne nið, æhta strudeð?
Þis is singal sacu. ... Ic þa rode ne þearf
hleah tre herigean. Hwæt, se hælend me
in þam engan ham oft getynde,
geomrum to sorge! Ic þurh Iudas ær
hyhtful gewearð, ond nu gehyned eom,
goda geasne, þurh Iudas eft,
fah ond freondleas. (*Elene*, 902–24a)¹²³

Neither text is likely to be fully understandable for anyone completely unfamiliar with the Gospels. In any given culture, a document directed at an audience sharing common knowledge will contain such allusions. The way in which those allusions are phrased, on the other hand, is likely to be culture-specific. The Latin text is allusive but refers to specific circumstances. The word *traditione* is particularly explicit. The issue is not sin or betrayal but the specific act of turning Jesus in to the Romans. By contrast, the Old English text shows little concern for the actual event and focuses exclusively on its broader, universal meaning. Only Judas's allegiance is considered significant enough to be mentioned. How it came to be manifest is largely irrelevant.

It appears thus that the frequent recourse to allusions in *Beowulf* is neither exceptional nor truly distinctive. What makes it seem different from other poems is the fact that many of the stories hinted at are largely unknown to us, so they arrest our attention more than Christian allusions do. It is likely that the intended audience of the poem would not have perceived any such discrepancy between the two kinds of allusions.

On the other hand, there is something slightly distinctive about the way in which Old English poems handle allusions. In the same way that Old English main narratives are often simplified to better represent a strong opposition between two antagonistic forces, Old English allusions to other stories tend to focus on the abstract forces underlying the action rather than on factual details.

That interest in abstraction can increase the impression of 'inactivity' in speeches. This is particularly true of hagiographical debates. Concerning *Guthlac A*, Abdou writes:

¹²³ 'Oh, but what is this man, who, through an ancient conflict, creates trouble anew for my people, who pursues ancient hostility, loots my possessions? This is endless enmity ... I need not praise the Cross joyfully. Listen! Often the saviour constrained me in that narrow home, to the sorrow of unhappy ones! Of old through Judas I became hopeful but now I am oppressed, deprived of my property, through Judas again, guilty and friendless.'

Because Guthlac states the truth, *soð*, he allows no opportunity for debate. Nonetheless, the devils, unable to learn from history, inevitably return to torment Guthlac yet again. It is this continual return which causes what has often been called the narrative's circularity, repetition, or stasis.¹²⁴

The same could be said for debates in *Juliana* or *Elene*.¹²⁵ Those poems are paradoxical in that they represent speech as a violent struggle, and thus presumably as eminently active, and yet those speeches seem to lead nowhere. As noted by Abdou, the saints' knowledge of the truth from the start prevents debate. It would be unthinkable for the saint to have a change of mind, of course. As for the opponent, their role is usually not to be convinced but to show off the saint's steadfastness through their excessive aggressiveness. Even in *Elene*, where the pattern is somewhat reversed, physical violence (imprisonment and starvation), not dialogue, leads to resolution.

That trend is typical of hagiography more widely, not just of Old English hagiographical poems. However, Old English poems tend to take the trend further than most texts. In particular, several critics have noted that the changes effected by Cynewulf emphasise the effect of polarisation in *Juliana*. Thus, Hermann has shown how the poem develops the opposite themes of steadfastness (and *stabilitas* in the Benedictine sense) and spiritual violence,¹²⁶ while Anderson has drawn attention to the fact that Cynewulf removed every potentially negative aspect from Juliana's character and emphasised the wickedness of her enemies.¹²⁷ Calder analyses the consequences of those changes in his study on Cynewulf:

This sharp change in perspective which Cynewulf introduces into *Juliana* alters the motivations of the characters and their very mode of being. For as personages who already perceive their ends, Juliana, Affricanus, Eleusius, the emperor, and the devil perform roles that require only the fulfillment of a known theology – the triumph of Christian right over Satanic wrong. And the narrative pattern in *Juliana* accordingly is ritualistic, not merely sequential or synoptic. The action of the poem is not an attempt to record accurately the significant deeds committed by historical persons, but a fixed ceremony and public ritual involving figures reenacting the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan. From Cynewulf's point of view the events chronicled can only gain in effect from being both iterative and ineluctable.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Abdou, 'Speech and Power in Old English Conversion Narratives', p. 204.

¹²⁵ *Andreas* has no real equivalent, however. The dialogue with the pilot may test Andreas's faith but it is not truly antagonistic.

¹²⁶ Hermann, 'Language and Spirituality in Cynewulf's *Juliana*'.

¹²⁷ Anderson, *Cynewulf: Structure, Style, and Theme in His Poetry*, pp. 84–102.

¹²⁸ Calder, *Cynewulf*, p. 80.

In other words, instead of ensuring a narrative progression as in the Latin text,¹²⁹ Cynewulf chooses to represent a violent opposition between two absolutes. The opposition is already at maximum intensity from the start, so that the very notion of evolution becomes irrelevant.¹³⁰

Hagiographical debate is thus fundamentally static, even circular. And yet, is it truly inactive? In the end, victory is granted by God alone,¹³¹ but it comes as a reward for the saint's steadfastness. The debate may have been static but the saint's words were not spoken in vain. What is true of hagiographical debates may not apply to other texts, but this should at least encourage us to think carefully on what 'inactive speech' truly means. Obviously, in Old English poetry, static does not necessarily mean powerless or inferior. The fact that certain poets are willing to modify their sources substantially to use devices that go against the 'progression' of speeches, precisely when they represent words spoken by highly positive characters conveying a crucial message, suggests that such devices are not seen primarily as impediments to action. Rather, it seems likely that such devices were considered very useful to convey a richer meaning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that Hart, Klaeber and Bartlett are right to consider that speeches in *Beowulf* and in Old English narrative poetry more widely are generally formal and do not favour linear progression. However, a taste for ceremony and eloquence for its own sake does not seem to be the reason for that. Outside *Beowulf*, there is not much evidence of an interest in courtly etiquette. It seems that all poems, beyond their differences, favour a mode of representation privileging abstraction and reflection over dynamic progression. In Direct

¹²⁹ In the *Passio Iulianae*, Juliana's rejection of Eleusius is not absolute from the start (initially she promises she will marry him if he becomes a prefect) and her interactions with her father and Eleusius only gradually become violent. By contrast, the Old English *Juliana* mentions torture from the very start (noted by Calder in *Cynewulf*, p. 85).

¹³⁰ In a paper on *Andreas* ('Figurative Language and its Contexts in *Andreas*', p. 124), Calder describes this polarising technique as 'expressionistic': 'The common stylistic qualities of expressionism are easily identifiable: tension, energy, deliberate distortion, a telescoping of narrative sequence, a disintegration into scenes or "stations" in dramatic or semi-dramatic forms, an abstraction that is purposively anti-mimetic. Expressionism is also pugnaciously dialectical, but expressionistic works do not conclude with a new synthesis emerging from the confrontation between thesis and antithesis; instead ... "the tension between the poles must inevitably lead to the destruction of one, while the other becomes absolute".' Final quote taken from Krispyn, *Style and Society in German Literary Expressionism*, p. 44.

¹³¹ See St Bartholomew's intervention to save Guthlac, or the anonymous angel preserving Juliana from torture, or the smoke signalling to Judas the presence of the true Cross.

The Content and Context of Direct Speech

Speech and in narrative, many devices are used to reveal the deeper meaning behind the events narrated and those devices are responsible for the apparent lack of dynamism in speeches.

It seems that Old English poets do not value Direct Speech for its capacity to 'further the action' but rather as a privileged moment of reflection on the meaning of the action under way, probably in part because it allows for the representation of an authoritative voice – that of an eye-witness – confronting an audience whose visible approval or wonder grants even greater legitimacy to the message conveyed.

A Lack of Subjectivity?

An author, Booth tells us, can never appear truly objective to their readers:

However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner – and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values ... regardless of how sincere an author may try to be, his different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms. Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the need of particular works.¹

The implied author may either narrate the story in their own name or delegate that task to a distinct narrator, possessed of their own attitude and point of view. The story is thus mediated through at least one subjective lens, often two. In many medieval texts, such subjectivity is hard to locate. Thus, Shippey comments on the impersonality of Old English verse:

The principles [of modern literature] are unity, relevance, ambiguity, individuality; principles which can be seen and have been demonstrated everywhere in English literature from Shakespeare to Pope, from Donne to Yeats. To this Hamlet-like subtlety Old English poetry returns the blank stare of the player without personality ... In Old English, style is not the man.²

Several factors can explain that apparent lack of subjectivity. First of all, the concepts of implied author and narrator, which are tremendously important to modern and postmodern literature, do not apply very well to many medieval texts. As noted by Marnette,³ the anonymity of much of the medieval corpus is in itself evidence of the very

¹ Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 71.

² Shippey, *Old English Verse*, pp. 12–13 (Shippey's phrasing is an allusion to Buffon's famous formula in his 1753 speech to the Académie Française: 'le style est l'homme même', 'style is the man himself'). See also Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 18: 'No subjectivity makes its mark throughout a text defining it as its own.'

³ Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale*, pp. 17–22.

different conception of textual authorship in that period. A lot of texts, including much of Old English poetry, do not appear as the productions of single individuals, but rather as the outcome of a complex process of transmission involving numerous actors: composers, translators, adaptors, scribes, compilers, but also, more fundamentally, all the past poets and audiences who contributed to shape the formulaic tradition, hence Pasternack's idea of an 'implied tradition' rather than an 'implied author'.⁴

Pasternack also notes that the need for a narrative figure arises from written transmission: in oral performance, the physical presence of the performer means that there is no need to create an artificial storyteller (i.e. a narrator). Admittedly, most of the extant Old English poems do seem to refer to a narrator in the first person at some point or other, but that 'staged I ... has not yet fully become a fictional narrator: the language remains formulaic rather than shaped to imply a particular subjectivity, and the "I" seldom dominates more than a movement or two of a verse sequence'.⁵

It appears, then, that Old English poems are not mediated through the subjective lenses of a narrator or implied author, at least not in the usual sense, and that might very well account for the impression that Old English narratives lack subjectivity. It does not, however, explain why the speeches in Old English poetry also feel rather impersonal as compared with more modern literary speeches. Characters in Old English poetry may not have the psychological depth of their Victorian counterparts, for instance, but, unlike Old English poetic narrators, they are reasonably well-defined entities with a name and social status, among other attributes, so that what is true of narrators need not necessarily apply to them.

To understand what is 'wrong' with subjectivity in Old English poetic speeches, it is necessary to use adequate tools. Such tools, I believe, may be found in the framework offered by enunciation theories. Those theories focus on linguistic subjectivity, i.e. on the linguistic devices through which speakers or writers make their presence and attitude perceptible in their verbal productions.⁶ Such devices include, in particular, deictics, modality markers and evaluative terms. An important benefit of that approach is that – somewhat paradoxically, perhaps – it allows for an objective analysis of subjectivity: the object of interpretation is not the individual sensibility of the person that produced a given text, which is largely inaccessible to us, but only

⁴ See Introduction, p. 20.

⁵ Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 14.

⁶ The approach chosen here is thus rather different from that of Mize (*Traditional Subjectivities*), whose work is concerned with the representation of cognition and perception in Old English literature and not with the linguistic features connecting the poem to various situations of utterance.

the visible, factual, linguistic traces of the situation of utterance in the utterance itself. Those traces signal how each element of discourse is located with reference to an origin, which is conventionally designated as the 'utterer'. The utterer is not a person of flesh and blood, but a linguistic abstraction – it is the fixed point from which the 'coordinate system' of discourse can be mapped.

In the case of Represented Speech, the situation is made rather more complex by the superimposition of two distinct coordinate systems: one whose origin corresponds to the speaking character and another whose origin corresponds to the author / narrator representing the character's speech. In Direct Speech, most traces of subjectivity are ostensibly located with reference to the character origin, but there can always be some interference from the other system.

In this chapter I examine passages in Direct Speech where linguistic traces of subjectivity are conspicuously lacking, in order to determine whether the proliferation of such passages is likely to account for the general impression of 'impersonality' evinced by Old English poetic speeches.

Enunciation Modes

In a seminal essay published in 1959, Benveniste opposes two types of enunciation (i.e. two ways of 'uttering'): history and discourse.⁷ 'History' is used to relate past events in a distanced manner, without displaying any trace of the writer's or speaker's involvement ('Personne ne parle ici; les événements semblent se raconter eux-mêmes').⁸ By contrast, 'discourse' displays maximum involvement through the use of many markers of actualisation and subjectivity.

If taken literally, Benveniste's position is somewhat excessive in that it seems to suggest the possibility of a purely objective text, devoid of origin or destination, which goes against everything we know about language as a tool for communication. In practice, no text is pure 'history' or pure 'discourse'. Most texts alternate between the two modes and individual instances of 'history' or 'discourse' will display varying degrees of conformity to the theoretical ideals presented above.

Benveniste's model has been abundantly commented on and criticised and it would go much beyond the scope of this chapter to examine all the arguments put forward. One suggested improvement on the model deserves consideration, however: while actualisation and subjectivity are undoubtedly often encountered together or not at

⁷ Benveniste, 'Les relations de temps dans le verbe français'.

⁸ 'No one is speaking here; events seem to relate themselves' (Benveniste, *ibid.*, p. 241).

A Lack of Subjectivity?

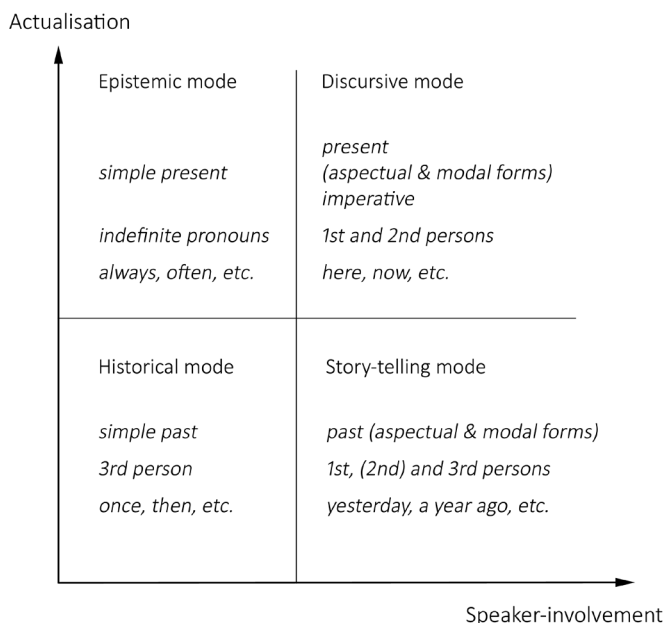


Fig 1 Enunciation modes
(adapted from Adam, *La linguistique textuelle*, p. 196)

all, one can be found without the other. A model allowing for four distinct modes therefore offers a better representation of existing texts:⁹

Each enunciation mode in Figure 1 is characterised by specific verbal, personal, spatial and temporal forms organised into a system.¹⁰ A given text will usually alternate between several modes, but some types of texts tend to be dominated by a given mode, thus scientific papers tend to be redacted almost exclusively in the epistemic mode, while historical essays will naturally favour the historical mode and oral conversations will usually alternate between discourse and story-telling. It is always possible for the speaker or writer to choose a mode different from the expected one, but this will constitute a marked choice and produce a proportional effect on the audience.

While dialogues in modern fiction differ from actual conversations in many ways,¹¹ they share with them a strong preference for the

⁹ Figure 1 presented here is freely adapted from Adam, *La linguistique textuelle*, p. 196. I have chosen the term 'epistemic' to describe the enunciation mode typical of general truths; and the term 'storytelling' to describe narratives with a strong speaker involvement.

¹⁰ The forms listed in Figure 1 are the most characteristic for each mode in Present-Day English. The lists provided are not exhaustive and the appropriate forms will vary from one language to another: verbal forms, in particular, are language-specific to a large extent.

¹¹ See Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, p. 65 (see also above, Chapter 1, p. 31).

Direct Speech in Beowulf

discourse and storytelling modes. For a modern audience, a different choice would thus presumably produce a strong, jarring effect. As such, it is entirely possible that a relatively low proportion of historical or epistemic passages in Old English poetic speeches might be enough to create an impression of anomalous impersonality.

Historical Mode

Old English poems sometimes use Direct Speech to relate past events. However, in most cases, the enunciation mode used is storytelling, as expected in Direct Speech. The secondary narratives found in Direct Speech are usually related by a protagonist or a direct witness who does not try to hide their involvement. Typical examples include the demon's confession in *Juliana* (468b–481), Eve's recounting of the Fall in *Christ and Satan* (408–23) or Beowulf's tale of his time at Heorot:

Weorod wæs on wyne; ne seah ic widan feorh
under heofones hwealf healsittendra
medudream maran. Hwylum mæru cwen,
friðusibb folca, flet eall geondhwearf,
bædde byre geonge; oft hio beahwriðan
secge sealde, ær hie to setle geong.
Hwylum for duguðe dohtor Hroðgares
eorlum on ende ealuwæge bær;
þa ic Freaware fletsittende
nemnan hyrde, þær hio nægled sinc
hæleðum sealde. (*Beowulf*, 2014–24a)¹²

The action is set in the past and concerns third parties and yet it is explicitly mediated through the point of view of the speaker who acts as the origin both of perception (*seah*, *hyrde*) and evaluation, as the atmosphere at court is judged against Beowulf's past experience. The rest of the narrative proceeds in much the same way: occasionally, the story is allowed to unfold in the historical mode for a little while,¹³ but the character regularly draws the attention back to his own role as a

¹² 'The crowd was in a cheerful mood; in all my life, under heaven's vault, I have never seen greater joy among people drinking mead in the hall. Sometimes the illustrious queen, the peace-provider of the people, crossed the entire length of the hall and approached the young sons; often she offered a ringed armlet to a man before she went to her seat. Sometimes, in presence of the noble men, Hrothgar's daughter carried the ale-cup to the earls at the end of the hall; I have heard those sitting in the hall, where she offered elaborate treasure to the men, call her Freawaru.'

¹³ There are a few other instances in the poem where storytelling also seems to turn into actual history for a little while, particularly when Hrothgar discusses Heremod's actions (1709b–1722a) and when Beowulf relates king Hrethel's loss of his eldest son (2435–71).

storyteller or to his audience in the person of Hygelac. That tendency to connect the recounting of past events with the present situation is particularly strong in *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan*, where it seems that the past is only interesting in as much as it sheds light on the present.¹⁴

A very notable exception to that general tendency is found in *Andreas*, when the saint recounts a miracle accomplished by Jesus (652–810). In that whole sequence (not counting the instances of speeches within the speech: 676–9, 717–26, 729–34 and 744–60), there are only two instances of a first-person pronoun (666a and 673a). This is all the more striking as neither the *Praxeis Andreou* nor the *recensio casanatensis* avoids first-person markers in this way. The way that the three texts begin the tale is particularly interesting:

Ἐγένετο πορευομένων ἡμῶν τῶν δώδεκα μαθητῶν μετὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν εἰς ἱερὸν τῶν ἐθνῶν [my italics] (*Praxeis Andreou*, § 12)¹⁵

Factum est autem cum *deambulassemus nos duodecim cum illo, et introivimus insimul cum eo in templum eorum* [my italics] (*recensio casanatensis*, § 12)¹⁶

Swa gesælde iu þæt se sigedema
ferde, frea mihtig. Næs þær folces ma
on siðfate, sinra leoda,
nemne *ellefne orettmæcgas,*
geteled tireadige. He wæs twelfta sylf.
Þa *we* becomon to þam cynestole,
þær getimbred wæs tempel dryhtnes,
heah ond horngeap, hæledum gefrege,
wuldre gewlitegod. [my italics] (*Andreas*, 661–9a)¹⁷

Both in the Greek and the Latin texts the initial focus of the story is on the disciples, and the saint highlights the fact that he is one of those twelve men. By contrast, the Old English text initially focuses on the sole figure of Christ, before mentioning the disciples with a noun phrase, as if the speaker had no connection with them whatsoever, which is highly unusual. The first-person pronoun does occur once in the following sentence, but the impression of distance created by the

¹⁴ Telling examples include *Christ and Satan*, 53–61a; *Genesis B*, 360b–96a and 791–820. See also *Guthlac A*, 452–69 and 478–93.

¹⁵ In Boenig's translation: 'It happened that when *we* twelve disciples were walking with *our* Lord into the temple of the Gentiles' [my italics] (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 8).

¹⁶ 'And it happened that the twelve of *us* travelled with him and *we* came together with him in their temple' [my italics].

¹⁷ 'Thus it happened once that the judge of victory travelled, a powerful lord. There were no more people on that expedition than *eleven warriors, considered gloriously fortunate*. He himself was the twelfth. Then *we* came to the capital; there was built a temple of the lord, high and wide-gabled, well known to men, adorned with glory' [my italics].

opening lines is such that a single pronoun is not enough to dismiss it entirely.

This case is very atypical, but it occurs precisely when the poet is trying to translate something relatively common in Latin narratives, but virtually unknown in Old English poetry: a secondary narrative told by a character who uses the first person to describe their own (minor) role in the story, but who draws very little attention to their role as a witness or narrator.¹⁸ In such narratives, the 'I' is not a real 'I': it designates the speaker as a character in the past and not the speaker as speaker. This might be the cause of the unease shown by the *Andreas* poet and the reason why several uses of the first person were eliminated from the translation, resulting in an even more 'historical' narrative.

While the historical mode is not entirely absent from Direct Speech, it thus constitutes a rather marginal phenomenon: while speaker involvement does not have to be displayed in every verse, it seems that Old English characters usually assume their roles as narrators and witnesses explicitly.

Epistemic or Proverbial Mode

The epistemic mode is characteristic of scientific and legal documents, but also of gnomic statements. Such statements are quite common in Old English poetry, whether in collections such as *Maxims I* and *II* or the *Durham Proverbs* or as stand-alones in narratives. Following Aristotle, gnomic statements are commonly subdivided into two categories: those pertaining to human action on the one hand, and those pertaining to the natural world on the other.¹⁹ However, as noted by Cavill,²⁰ this subdivision may not accurately reflect how gnomic statements were perceived in Anglo-Saxon culture: after all, both types present the same formal features in Old English texts.

Hansen provides the following list of typical markers: the verb forms *sceal*, *bið* and *mæg*, the adjectives *gedefe* and *gemet* ('what is proper'), the comparatives *selre* and *selast* ('better' and 'best'), the frequency

¹⁸ In our corpus, only *Andreas* and *Elene* (464–510) present such narratives. In *Elene* as well, the historical mode is more dominant in the Old English translation than in the original (especially lines 477–500a), though this results from the poet's restructuring of the story rather than from the suppression of subjectivity markers.

¹⁹ *Rhetoric*, Book II, chapter 21, § 1394a. The terminology varies from one author to another, however: statements pertaining to human action are 'type I' for Chadwick and Chadwick (*The Growth of Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 377–403), 'maxims' for Cavill (*Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 43–50), and 'proverbs' for Anscombe ('Proverbes et formes proverbiales', p. 97) and Kleiber ('Sur la définition du proverbe'), while those pertaining to the natural world are respectively 'type II', 'gnomes' and 'sayings' ('dictons').

²⁰ Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 43.

adverbs *a* ('always'), *oft* ('often') and *oftost* ('most often') and the relative constructions *se þe* or *se þæm* ('he who', 'he to whom').²¹

What makes a gnomic statement, however, is not the use of a particular word, but the use of a coherent system, i.e. of a particular enunciation mode. The fact that the enunciation mode selected is different from that of the discourse as a whole is also an important feature.²² Cavill provides the following description of 'proverbiality',²³ which matches very closely the epistemic mode described above (present tense, indefinite subjects and lack of proximal deictics):

1. The gnomic verb, the main modal or lexical verb in the expression, must be in the present tense.
2. The subject of the gnomic verb can be God or fate or the devil or a natural phenomenon or a class of human beings, but not a specified individual person.
3. There must be no deictic reference to specify the particular situation.

That description holds true not just for Old English proverbs, but also for gnomic statements in many languages, including French, where the properties of the proverbial (or epistemic) mode have received significant critical attention.

For Berrendonner,²⁴ a statement may be posited as true in three different ways: S-true (true for the speaker), Ø-true (true in the natural order of things, as part of reality) and PEOPLE-true, i.e. true for at least one other person than the speaker. What I translate as 'PEOPLE-true' is actually '*ON-vrai*' in French, where *ON* is an indefinite pronoun which, unlike 'they' or 'someone' in English, is typically inclusive of the speaker: in casual speech, it is frequently used as a synonym for *nous* ('we'). For Berrendonner, *ON* is synonymous with the public opinion and its role is to denote an anonymous doxa. For him, proverbial statements are typically PEOPLE-true. A similar point is made by Maingueneau,²⁵ who explains that when someone uses a proverb, it is as if the proverb was asserted by two entities at once: the speaker themselves and the community authoring the proverb. Gnomic

²¹ 'Hrothgar's "Sermon" in *Beowulf* as Parental Wisdom', p. 55, quoted by Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 44. Studies on proverbs across the world tend to list similar features (particularly frequency adverbs, modality markers and axiological vocabulary): see Krikmann, 'On Denotative Indefiniteness of Proverbs', p. 59 (quoted by Deskis, *Beowulf and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*, pp. 4–5).

²² See Krikmann, 'On Denotative Indefiniteness of Proverbs', p. 66: Krikmann writes that one important characteristic of proverbs is that they do not fit with the larger textual context in terms of content and genericity.

²³ The extract is taken from Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 51. The notion of 'proverbiality' is discussed on p. 74.

²⁴ Berrendonner, *Éléments de pragmatique linguistique*, pp. 40–66.

²⁵ See Maingueneau, 'Un problème cornélien', p. 14, and 'Hyperénonciateur et "participation"', p. 114.

statements therefore also have a social function: they constitute a way for the speaker to signal that they (and their addressee) belong to that particular community.

While the social function of gnomic statements in Anglo-Saxon culture is undeniable,²⁶ the notion that such statements are 'PEOPLE-true' needs to be qualified. There is a hierarchy implicit in Berrendonner's analysis: 'PEOPLE-truth' offers a better guarantee than mere 'S-truth', but it is not absolute in the way that 'Ø-truth' is. This hierarchy is characteristic of modern and contemporary cultures, which interpret 'popular wisdom' negatively, as belonging only to the lower classes. As noted by Tamba, this is a perversion of the original meaning of the word 'popular', which originally refers to the achievements of the people (i.e. the nation) as a whole.²⁷

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when the status of popular truth declined, as this was likely a very gradual process, but there is significant evidence to suggest that the phenomenon was already well under way by the beginning of the seventeenth century, not just in England, but in much of Western Europe. In England, several writers, including Thomas Overbury, Ben Jonson and Thomas Browne, disparage the use of proverbs and associate the practice with the uneducated,²⁸ while elsewhere in Europe Molière's Sganarelle and Cervantes's Sancho Panza – menservants of Dom Juan and Don Quixote respectively – gain comic fame through their overabundant use of proverbs. Those characters are particularly emblematic of the new, ambiguous attitude towards proverbiality. On the one hand, proverbs and their users are not taken seriously, as the two characters are obviously used more for comic relief than for any contribution that they might make to an intellectual debate. On the other hand, they are not entirely disqualified: Sganarelle and Sancho Panza's words are often used as a counterpoint, to highlight the failings of their better-educated masters. In other words, the truths they provide are represented as homely and somewhat quaint, but as valid truths nonetheless – they are PEOPLE-truths.

There are no Sganarelles or Sancho Panzas in Old English literature. In that corpus, the characters using proverbs are saints and noble heroes rather than servants, which in itself is significant of the higher value attached to proverbial knowledge.²⁹ The difference is more than just sociological or cultural, however, it is epistemological:

²⁶ See in particular Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, chapter 6 'The Social Function of Maxims and *The Battle of Maldon*', pp. 106–31.

²⁷ Tamba, 'Formules et dire proverbial', p. 113, especially n. 4.

²⁸ See Frank, 'Proverbs in Medieval Literature', pp. 508–15.

²⁹ Proverb users include Beowulf (*Beowulf*, 455b and 1838b–1839), Wiglaf (*Beowulf*, 2891 and 3077–8), Guthlac (*Guthlac A*, 361 and 388) and even Christ himself (*Andreas*, 313b–314 and 425b–426). The use of proverbs is not restricted to characters either. Gnomic statements

Since the Enlightenment ... knowledge has characteristically taken the form of abstractions ... knowledge that is valuable is new ... It is personal and quantitative in that one individual can have more of it than another. For traditional societies, however, knowledge is what everybody knows, or what is in principle knowable by everyone; it is essentially old, it is communal and qualitative ... in pre-theoretical thought, maxims are a way of preserving truth ... They are the highest, not the lowest form of knowledge.³⁰

In other words, there is no distinction between PEOPLE-truth and Ø-truth in Anglo-Saxon culture. Gnostic statements express THE truth, which happens to be accessible only through collective experience. In a sense, in the Christian perspective, which is that of the composers of the extant Old English corpus, gnostic statements even express a form of truth that is superior to Ø-truth in that they do not merely present things as they are, but they also express the order of the world, such as it has been meaningfully ordained by God. The fact that truth is understood to be the product of accumulated experience rather than of deliberate (and falsifiable) experimentation may also explain why natural and moral laws are presented in the same way: both are equally available to personal experience, though they are not equally available to the scientific method.

The way gnostic statements are introduced in Old English poetry may also be symptomatic of their elevated epistemic status. Whether in everyday conversation or in literature, in modern times it is common for gnostic statements to be introduced through a phrase such as 'as they say' or 'it is true that'. The role of such phrases is to characterise the gnostic statement as a gnostic statement, and thus as a different, perhaps even alien, presence within the main discourse. If a *verbum dicendi* is associated with another speaker ('they say' rather than 'I say') the impression of distance between the proverb and the speaker is even stronger. It is as if the proverb were presented, but not truly asserted, i.e. not taken responsibility for by the speaker.³¹

also occur within the narrative itself (e.g. *Beowulf*, 183b–188 and 1057b–1062; *Christ and Satan*, 362b–364; *Andreas*, 120b–121).

³⁰ Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 8–9. See also Shippey, *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English*, p. 19 ('All that can be said for sure is that the gnostic poems, like the didactic poems generally bear witness to a strong liking for setting out the fruits of experience in a direct and incontrovertible form; and that they aim at a definitive, even quasi-legal tone'); and Nelson, "'Is" and "Ought" in the Exeter Book Maxims', p. 110 ('*Maxims I* is unified by the poet's insistence that men should share the knowledge they have, and by his certainty of the truth of the knowledge shared and of the value of the act of sharing'). Desks also points to the importance of proverbs in medieval schools as a sign of their prestige and perceived usefulness (*Beowulf and the Medieval Proverb Tradition*, pp. 144–8).

³¹ On that topic, see Cerquiglini and Cerquiglini, 'L'écriture proverbiale'; Anscombe, 'Proverbes et formes proverbiales'.

Such phrases do exist in Old English prose,³² but not so much in Old English poetry. Usually, gnomic statements are introduced very bluntly, as in these passages:

and hie geseƷnað mid his swiðran hond,
lædeð to lihte, þær hi lif agon
a to aldre, uplicne ham,
byrhtne burhstyre. *Blæd bið æghwæm*
þæm ðe hælende heran þenceð,
and wel is þam ðe þæt wyrcan mot. [my italics] (*Christ and Satan*, 359–64)³³

Weard mæpelode, ðær on wicge sæt,
ombeht unforht: *‘Æghwæþres sceal*
scearp scyldwiga gescad witan,
worda ond worca, se þe wel þenceð.
Ic þæt gehyre, þæt þis is hold weorod
frecn Scyldinga. [my italics] (*Beowulf*, 286–91a)³⁴

Occasionally, a connector such as *forðan* (*Beowulf*, 1059a), *swa* (*Beowulf*, 2291a) or *huru* (*Guthlac A*, 361a) will be used, but in most cases the transition is seamless, the only clue being the change of enunciation mode. As such, the gnomic statement is not presented as something other, and the responsibility for its assertion is definitely not placed on an outside entity. The shift to a mode with lesser speaker involvement does create an impression of distance, but it is not quite the same as when a prefatory phrase is used: it is not so much the proverb itself that is kept at bay and identified as something alien, but rather the speaker (the ‘utterer’) who steps back to let a greater truth take the floor.

Maxims may be exploited for different purposes. Their structuring role has been noted by critics, who mention for instance their frequent use at the beginning or at the end of a speech.³⁵ The proverbial mode is well-suited to that function as its disconnection from any situation of utterance provides neutral ground for the transition between two utterances (the speaker’s and the narrator’s). The same device is just as effective as a transition between two passages anchored in different situations. In *Beowulf*, for instance, a maxim is used on lines 2029b–2031 to ease the transition between the description of the court at Heorot and the pseudo-prophetic tale of Freawaru’s tragic fate. In *Christ and Satan*, maxims are also used to frame an exhortative passage (193–223) within the narrative.

³² See Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, p. 29.

³³ ‘And he will mark them with the sign of the Cross with his right hand, he will lead them to the light, where they will have eternal life, a home above, a bright city. *Felicity comes to everyone who thinks to obey the saviour and well is it for them who manage to do so.*’

³⁴ ‘The guardian spoke formally; there he sat on his steed, a fearless officer: “*The clever shield-bearer who thinks well must be able to understand each of these two things: words and actions. I hear this, that this is a troop faithful to the lord of the Scyldings.*”’

³⁵ See Chapter 1, n. 137.

Gnomic statements may also be used to support an argument. For Anscombe,³⁶ such statements are commonly used in contemporary press or in ordinary conversation, not for the information they impart, but rather for the authoritative frame they can provide to an ongoing argument. In the context of Old English poetry, the situation is slightly different. On the one hand, the greater truth value of proverbs in Anglo-Saxon culture makes them even more apt to provide authority. On the other hand, and for the same reason, it is unlikely that the information imparted would have been overlooked. A comparison with other cultures valuing proverbs highly confirms that intuition: Finnegan has noted that in several African cultures, proverbs were frequently used in law cases or disputes, where their function was similar to that of legal precedents in other societies.³⁷ She also explains that proverbs are useful in that they allow the speaker to step back ‘from heat of the actual situation’ to look at its wider implications, and that their allusive nature means they can be used in many different ways.³⁸ Argumentative strategies need to be understood in the specific context of their situation of utterance. In the case of Direct Speech in narrative poetry, that situation is complex in that two situations of utterance are superimposed: a character is speaking to other characters, but at the same time a narrator is speaking to an audience and the maxims may be used to further an argument on either (or both) of those levels.

When maxims are used in Direct Speech in hagiographic or homiletic poems, the initial impression is that they support an argument made by one character to another. However, closer inspection reveals that such is not their primary role. The following extract from *Guthlac A* provides a good example:

Nis þisses beorges setl
meodumre ne mara þonne hit men duge
se þe in þrowingum þeodnes willan
dæghwam dreogeð. *Ne sceal se dryhtnes þeow*
in his modsefan mare gelufian
eorþan æhtwelan þonne his anes gemet,
þæt he his lichoman lade hæbbe. [my italics] (*Guthlac A*, 384b–389)³⁹

Ostensibly, the maxim is used by Guthlac to settle his argument with the demons. In reality, though, that dimension is at best secondary. First of all, the connection between the maxim and the topic at hand is

³⁶ Anscombe, ‘Proverbes et formes proverbiales’, p. 106.

³⁷ Finnegan, ‘Proverbs in Africa’, pp. 27–8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁹ ‘The site of this hill is neither smaller nor bigger than what is appropriate for the man who accomplishes the lord’s will every day through his sufferings. *The servant of the lord must not have greater love in his heart for earthly goods than what is enough for him alone, so that he might have sustenance for his body.*’

relatively tenuous: the maxim is in keeping with the general message of the poem, but it could just as easily be used almost anywhere else in the poem. Second, as noted at the end of Chapter 2 (pp. 98–100), hagiographical debates are not truly argumentative and this particular one is no exception. Neither the demons nor the audience need to be convinced that Guthlac should stay where he is: the former because their *raison d'être* is to oppose the saint in his endeavour anyway, and the latter because as Christians they can only be on the saint's side from the start.

In fact, the speech shows no attempt to progress towards any specific goal: its reasoning is repetitive and to some extent circular.⁴⁰ The maxim is not just a convenient way to put an end to an otherwise potentially unending speech, however. It also allows the poet to connect Guthlac's situation to a universal message that concerns all Christians and especially those who have chosen monastic life. The maxim is a memorable rephrasing of the obligation of poverty expressed in *Benedict's Rule*,⁴¹ which also emphasises moderation rather than asceticism. As such, the use of the maxim has an obvious didactic function for the audience, especially if monks were the intended audience, as suggested by Jones.⁴² It also contributes to the characterisation of Guthlac as a successor of Saint Benedict; it suggests that Guthlac is not just an individual, but an example, whose acts (verbal and otherwise) have universal value.⁴³

Guthlac A is representative of the hagiographic and homiletic corpus in that its maxims seem primarily directed towards the edification of the audience. Direct Speech is a privileged location for them as it gives them greater visibility, but it is by no means the only possible one. In fact, the connection of the maxims with their immediate textual context is often loose enough that most maxims used within the same poem are interchangeable to a large extent.

The use of maxims in *Beowulf* is more subtle. In some cases, they explicitly support the point made in the immediate textual context, for instance when Wiglaf reminds his companions that death is better than dishonour (2891) after berating them on the same topic, or when the narrator criticises the Danes' recourse to pagan rituals (183b–188). In others, though, their use is more ambivalent. When the coastguard states that 'the clever shield-bearer who thinks well must be able to understand each of these two things: words and actions' (287b–289), for instance, it seems that the statement must apply to some of the

⁴⁰ The repeated use of concessive clauses introduced by *ðeah* contributes to that impression of circularity.

⁴¹ Hanslik, ed., *Benedicti regula*, chapters 33 and 34.

⁴² Jones, 'Envisioning the *Cenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*'.

⁴³ See Maingueneau's analysis of the role of maxims to support characterisation in 'Un problème cornélien', pp. 19–20.

people present in some way, but it is not clear who or in what way exactly. Is he casting doubt on Beowulf's ability to live up to his fair words or, on the contrary, praising him for having shown he mastered at least one of those skills? Is he commenting on his own decision to allow armed men into the country that he is supposed to guard?

It is entirely possible that the maxim would have been more easily understandable for the intended audience of the poem, who presumably shared a number of cultural assumptions with the poet. Yet, it is also true that the 'objectivised' enunciation typical of maxims is a fertile ground for such contextual ambiguities, especially in the absence of a prefatory phrase that might have clarified the connection between the maxim and its context.

The same phenomenon also occurs within the narrative. The maxim on the dangers of cupidity, quoted when Wiglaf is examining the dragon's treasure (2764b–2766) is certainly topical, but there is no indication as to whether Wiglaf or any other character in the poem is targeted and if so in what way. In the end, it is up to the audience to decide for themselves whether all the characters in the poem behave in accordance with that statement. Maxims need not stifle reflection by providing ready-made answers. On the contrary, they can encourage the listener to meditate on what constitutes fitting behaviour.

Maxims do not play a strategic role in all poems. Cynewulf, most notably, uses them very little, though when he does, as in *Christ II*, 779–782b, he does it in a manner quite typical of homiletic and hagiographic poetry more widely. The most puzzling use of maxims is probably found in *Genesis B*. The poem contains a number of gnomic or quasi-gnomic statements, mostly concerned with the order of the world, but they do not seem to fit into a deliberate rhetorical strategy. In some instances, as when the demon posing as an angel describes God's position in the world (510b–513a), it seems as if the gnomic statement is used to help the demon in its deception by projecting an aura of superior wisdom. However, similar comments also occur elsewhere in the poem (e.g. 313–16a, 479b–489a or 529b–531a), where there is no such justification for them: it might be that, as Shippey suggested, the poet is simply too fond of maxims to resist them.⁴⁴

Generally speaking, it does not seem that poets are using maxims in markedly different ways in Direct Speech and in narrative. However, there is a phenomenon closely related to maxims that is very typical of Direct Speech: the use of statements straddling the line between the epistemic and discursive modes.

⁴⁴ Shippey, 'Maxims in Old English Narrative', p. 37. The poet responsible for the use of gnomic statements is more likely to be the composer of the Old Saxon original rather than the Old English translator: see Cavill, 'Notes on Maxims in Old English Narrative'.

Direct Speech in Beowulf
Pseudo-Proverbial Mode

The passages that I call pseudo-proverbial are those that, while using markers characteristic of the discursive mode, in particular first- and second-person markers, also borrow some features from the proverbial mode. Most notable are structures that move the focus away from the human agent (especially if the agent is the speaker or the addressee), thus de-emphasising some key markers of subjectivity. Such constructions are especially common with reference to the future and the retribution that it might bring.

Passive Constructions

One such construction involves the use of a passive form, as in the following example:

þe is susl weotod (*Christ and Satan*, 691)⁴⁵
 Beneficiary + *beon* + inanimate subject + past participle

That pattern knows a few variants. The verb *beon* may appear in initial position or be replaced by another copular verb such as *weorþan* or *wunian*. I have noted nineteen instances of that pattern in the corpus examined here,⁴⁶ all in religious texts, though there is nothing comparable in the Latin source when such a source does exist. Thus in this extract from *Genesis A*, the passive construction translates an active one in the Latin:

dixitque Deus ecce *dedi* vobis omnem herbam adferentem semen super
 terram et universa ligna quae habent in semet ipsis sementem generis
 sui ut sint vobis in escam
 et cunctis animantibus terrae omnique volucris caeli et universis quae
 moventur in terra et in quibus est anima vivens ut habeant ad vescen-
 dum et factum est ita [my italics] (Gen. I.29–30)⁴⁷

Inc sceal sealt wæter
 wunian on gewealde and eall worulde gesceaft.
 ... *Inc is halig feoh*
and wilde deor on geweald geseald,

⁴⁵ 'For you a punishment is ordained'.

⁴⁶ *Genesis A* (1485–87a, 1514b–1517); *Genesis B* (430–2a, 728b–30a); *Christ and Satan* (691); *Andreas* (102b–105a, 889–91a, 951, 1611b–1612); *Elene* (309b–310a, 339–41, 605b–607a); *Guthlac A* (8–9a, 486b–487a, 658–60, 667b–670a, 678b–680); *Juliana* (171b–173 and 263b–265a).

⁴⁷ 'And God said: "Here I *have given* you every plant bearing seed on the earth's surface and all the trees with the seed of their own species so they can be food for you and for all the animate beings of the earth, all the flying creatures of the sky and all those that move on earth and in which there is a living soul so they could feed on it." And it was so' [my italics].

A Lack of Subjectivity?

*and lifigende, ða ðe land tredað,
feorheaceno cynn, ða ðe flod wecceð
geond hronrade. Inc hyrað eall [my italics] (Genesis A, 198b–205)⁴⁸*

Usually, the transformation from active to passive voice has semantic consequences as it allows for the backgrounding of the agent and the foregrounding of the patient or the beneficiary. Here, the greater emphasis on the beneficiaries is particularly striking as the personal pronoun *inc* is repeated three times in initial position.⁴⁹

Such a prominent use of the second person is a clear sign that the speech is firmly anchored in the situation of utterance. However, the effacement of the first person has consequences on the tonality of the speech, especially when compared with another divine promise:

mathe dilectissime nobis, ne timeas, ego enim tecum sum, non enim te desero neque relinquo, set volo, ut sustineas hic viginti et septem diebus, ut per te et propter te gubernetur plurimas animas istorum hominum, qui in magno patibulo tecum sunt in isto carcere. (recensio casanatensis, § 3)⁵⁰

*Ic þe, Matheus, mine sylle
sybbe under swegle. Ne beo ðu on sefan to forht,
ne on mode ne murn. Ic þe mid wunige
ond þe alyse of þyssum leoðubendum,
ond ealle þa menigo þe þe mid wuniað
on nearonedum. (Andreas, 97–102a)⁵¹*

The addressee is referred to here as well, in particular through the use of a vocative, but he is not alone: the speaker is also referred to and Kuhn's first law ensures that the two personal pronouns are placed

⁴⁸ 'In your power, for the two of you, shall remain salt water and all the earthly creation. *In your power is given consecrated livestock, as well as wild beasts and living beings*, those that tread the earth, races endowed with life, those that move through water in the ocean. The two of you they will obey' [my italics].

⁴⁹ That anaphora is given extra emphasis in the manuscript through the use of initial capitals.

⁵⁰ 'Our dearest Matthew, do not be afraid, for I am with you, I do not abandon you or leave you, but I want you to hold firm here for twenty-seven days and I want the many souls of these men who are in fetters with you in this prison to be guided through you and because of you.' The corresponding passage in the *Praxeis Andreou* is translated thus by Robert Boenig: 'Hold fast, our Mathias, and do not be afraid; for I will not abandon you. For I will rescue you from every danger – and not only you but all your brothers who are with you. For I am with you each and every hour' (p. 2). The beginning of the Old English speech actually corresponds to the end of that speech in Greek (translated by Boenig as 'Peace to you, our Mathias') and Latin (*pax tecum*, 'peace be with you').

⁵¹ 'I give you, Matthew, my peace under the sky. Do not be afraid in your mind, nor troubled in your heart. I will stay with you and free you from these chains, as well as the crowd of people who are with you in this terrible situation.'

next to each other before the first stressed syllable.⁵² Taken altogether, the first line of the speech presents a chiasmic structure, with first-person markers on the outside and second-person markers on the inside. The expression of divine protection is thus not merely subjective, but intersubjective in that it draws attention to the relation between the two co-speakers. The use of the active voice also preserves the notion that the relation is fully intentional as the subject of the proposition is a true actor and not the patient of a process beyond their control.

Interestingly enough, the next part of the speech adopts the opposite strategy, backgrounding the agent as in the extract from *Genesis A* above. This passage has no equivalent in the Greek or Latin texts:

 þe is neorxnawang,
blæda beorhtost, boldwela fægrost,
hama hyhtlicost, halegum mihtum
torht ontyned. (*Andreas*, 102–5a)⁵³

In a sense, this is just another way of saying the same thing, i.e. that God is granting grace to Matthew. The information is not new, but the tone is. The backgrounding of the agent, when the agent happens to be the speaker, is often a way for the speaker not to take responsibility for their own decision. That is all the difference between ‘you are fired’ and ‘I am firing you’. In the present case, however, such an interpretation would make no sense. Not only would it seem incongruous for God to shirk responsibility, but the fact that God’s intent has already been stated explicitly rather undermines any potential of success that such a strategy might have had. Therefore, the objective must be elsewhere.

A closer look at the contexts in which the pattern occurs sheds more light on the issue. Most instances fall into one of two categories: promises of reward and threats of punishment, quite often in an eschatological context.⁵⁴ Even when the context is different, the origin of the reward or punishment is usually divine, or at least sacred.⁵⁵ Their

⁵² Kuhn, ‘Zur Wortstellung und –betonung im Altgermanischen’, especially p. 8. For an in-depth study of Kuhn’s laws, see Momma, *The Composition of Old English Poetry*.

⁵³ ‘For you, through the holy powers of paradise, the most splendid abundance, the most beautiful dwelling, the most pleasant home is gloriously revealed.’

⁵⁴ Five of the nine promises following that pattern are about paradise (*Andreas*, 102b–105a and 1611b–1612; *Guthlac A*, 8–9a, 486b–487a and 658–60). Four out of ten threats explicitly mention hell (*Christ and Satan*, 691b–692a; *Andreas*, 889–91) while two others are about the Fall, which eventually condemns Adam and Eve to hell (*Genesis B*, 430–2a and 728b–730a).

⁵⁵ *Genesis A* (198b–205) is about Adam and Eve being granted Eden; *Genesis A* (1485–7a and 1514b–1516) about the land promised to Noah after the Flood; *Elene* (429–31) about the coming of the Messiah; and *Elene* (605b–607a) about the punishments that Judas is threatened with by Elene. The other uses of the pattern are when God tells *Andreas* of the ordeals he will have to endure to accomplish his holy mission (951b–954a) and the instances in *Juliana* discussed here (169–74 and 263b–265a).

distribution is thus rather similar to that of maxims in *Wa / Wel bið þæm þe*.⁵⁶ It is entirely possible that the backgrounding of the agent is meant to deanthropomorphise divine agentivity so that it no longer appears as a personal will, but rather as a kind of immanent and irresistible force – a conception perhaps closer to the Germanic *wyrd* than to the God of Abraham, though too little is known about the precise meaning of *wyrd* to be certain of that.

Stylistically, that choice takes the expression of divine retribution closer to gnomic statements, which articulate what is necessarily true rather than contingent wishes. The enunciation is not proverbial as such, given the use of the second person, but the effacement of first-person markers and the use of a copula in the present tense in an eschatological context are probably enough to call to mind the epistemic mode and its associated connotations of higher truth.

The only text that does not quite fit that model is *Juliana*, where the pattern is used by the saint's enemies to describe the tortures prepared for her:

Conuertere ad me et declina omnes cruciatos qui tibi parati sunt si sacrificare nolueris. (*Passio Iulianae*, § 3)⁵⁷

Gif þu godum ussum gen gecwemest,
ond þe to swa mildum mundbyrd secest,
hylðo to halgum, beoð þe ahylded fram
wraþe geworhtra wita unrim,
grimra gyrna, þe þe gegearwad sind,
gif þu onseggan nelt soþum gieldum. (*Juliana*, 169–74)⁵⁸

Iuliane mea, pessima tormenta parauit tibi praefectus. (*Passio Iulianae*, § 6)⁵⁹

Þe sind heardlicu,
wundrum wælgrim, witu geteohhad
to gringwraece. (*Juliana*, 263b–265a)⁶⁰

It is worth noticing that in this case the use of passive constructions is in part inspired by the source. In the first extract, one of the two passive constructions is literally translated from the Latin (*qui tibi parati sunt: þe þe gegearwad sind*), while, in the second text, the rejection

⁵⁶ Cavill, *Maxims in Old English Poetry*, pp. 89–98.

⁵⁷ 'Turn to me and away from the tortures that are prepared for you if you refuse to offer a sacrifice.'

⁵⁸ 'If even now you satisfy our gods and seek for yourself the protection of such benevolent ones, the favour of holy beings, a great number of torments, cruelly devised, will be averted from you, terrible hardships that are prepared for you if you will not offer a sacrifice to the true gods.'

⁵⁹ 'My Juliana, the prefect has prepared the worst torments for you.'

⁶⁰ 'Terrible, incredibly ferocious tortures are ordained to torment you.'

of the agent at the end of the sentence may already be interpreted as a kind of backgrounding.

It is very likely that the presence of such structures in the Latin text influenced Cynewulf's decision to use the formula for divine retribution, but it was probably not the only reason for that choice. The poem is remarkable for the way in which the representatives of evil usurp the vocabulary of good.⁶¹ It is visible in the passage quoted above, with its reference to truth (*sopum*) and protection (*mundbyrd*), but also more generally in the rest of the poem where the notions of legitimate authority, true divinity and judgement occur repeatedly. In that context, the use of a formula for retribution usually associated with divine power does not appear as an exception but rather as further evidence of Cynewulf's manipulation of convention to criticise the illegitimate arrogance of pagans and demons.

The Expression of Death

Another conventional backgrounding structure may be found to express death in *Beowulf*. In this case, the active voice is preserved, but the actual cause of death (often a human agent) is backgrounded while an inanimate object or an abstract entity is used as the subject. Here is a typical example of that pattern:⁶²

opðe mec deað nimeð (*Beowulf*, 1491b)
unstressed particles + *deað* / inanimate cause of death + inflected form
of (for)niman

One might be tempted to interpret the pattern as a way to anthropomorphise death (or battle), conceived of as a creature endowed with its own agentive power. However, there is no evidence to support that hypothesis. Death is ascribed no feelings and no physical attributes. The constitution of an actual allegorical figure is also made more difficult by the fact that several words can be used interchangeably as the subject of the sentence. Additionally, there are important conceptual differences between some of those words: *ecg*, for instance, is very concrete whereas *deað* or *wyrd* are more abstract. The point of the pattern

⁶¹ See Calder, *Cynewulf*, pp. 76–103.

⁶² The most common combinations of unstressed particles are the use of a conjunction (*gif*, *opþe*, *opþæt*, *ac*) followed by a personal pronoun in the accusative (*hine*, *mec*) or a third-person pronoun together with a relative pronoun (*se þe*, *þara ðe*). Instances of this pattern in *Beowulf* include: *se þe hine deað nimeð*, 441b, 'he that death will take'; *gif mec deað nimeð*, 447b, 'if death takes me'; *opðe mec deað nimeð*, 1491b, 'or death will take me'; *gif mec hild nime*, 452b and 1481b, 'if battle takes me'; *oððe guð nimeð*, 2536b, 'or battle will take me'; *þe þa deað fornam*, 488b, 'as death took them'; *wældeað fornam*, 695b, 'a violent death took them'; *sunu deað fornam*, 2119b, 'death took his son'; *Wig ealle fornam*, 1080b, 'battle took them all'; *ac hýne ecg fornam*, 2772b, 'but the edge of a sword took him'; *hýne wyrd fornam*, 1205b, 'fate took him'.

is not so much to personalise death but rather to depersonalise the act of killing itself.

The formula is very often used to describe death in battle and in many cases the person responsible for the death is well known, as in this passage:

Wen ic þæt he wille, gif he wealdan mot,
in þæm guðsele Geotena leode
etan unforhte, swa he oft dyde,
mægen Hreðmanna. Na þu minne þearft
hafalan hydan, ac he me habban wile
dreore fahne, gif mec deað nimeð. (*Beowulf*, 442–7)⁶³

The text makes no mystery concerning who might kill Beowulf or concerning the fact that the killing will be fully intentional. As such, it might seem strange to favour an impersonal structure.

One possible answer may be found in the poem's heroic ethos: clearly, it is understood that warriors do the best they can, but in the end they have no control over who dies – only an outside force (be it fate or God) does. This view is expressed explicitly at least twice:

Wyrð oft nereð
unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah. (*Beowulf*, 572b–573)⁶⁴

ond siþðan witig god
on swa hwæpere hond, halig dryhten,
mæroðo deme, swa him gemet þince. (*Beowulf*, 685b–687)⁶⁵

The way that Beowulf phrases his oaths also contributes to the same idea: he never promises that he will accomplish something, only that he will either accomplish it or die trying.⁶⁶ In other words, he shows awareness of the fact that his will is only one of the factors at play and not necessarily the most decisive one.

The 'opðe mec deað nimeð' formula in *Beowulf* therefore seems to have a precise meaning and to be grounded in a coherent understanding of the world. Similar phrases occur elsewhere in the corpus, however, where the same understanding does not seem to apply. This is especially true when the speaker is God, as it would seem awkward for God to humbly recognise the existence of a force superior to his own

⁶³ 'I expect that he will want, if he can make it so, to eat without fear the people of the Geats in the hall of battle, the troop of renowned men, as he often did before. You will have no need to cover my head, but he will want to have me, soiled with blood, if death takes me.'

⁶⁴ 'Fate often protects the man who is not fated to die if his courage proves good enough.'

⁶⁵ 'And then wisely God, the holy lord, will grant glory to whichever of the two seems worthier to him.'

⁶⁶ See *Beowulf*, 632–8, 1490b–1491 and 2535b–2537.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

will. Consider these two extracts from *Genesis A*, without equivalent in the Vulgate:

þæt sceal fyr wrecan,
swefyl and sweart lig sare and grimme,
hat and hæste hæðnum folce. (*Genesis A*, 2416b–2418)⁶⁷

Be abregdan sceal
for þære dæde deað of breostum
sawle þine. (*Genesis A*, 2639b–2641a)⁶⁸

The same topos of death as a seemingly autonomous agent is used, though the image is rather more concrete in the first of the two excerpts. The aim cannot be for God to be represented as denying responsibility or bowing to a superior power.

The use of *sculan* suggests a possible comparison with other divine speeches already commented upon for their tendency to use a pseudo-proverbial style, especially as the context is once again about divine judgement. The effacement of the agent is also, in this case, an effacement of the utterer and thus a way to take the utterance closer to the proverbial mode, which, in Old English poetry, connotes the highest kind of truth. It is possible, and even likely, that the pattern found in *Genesis A* has its origin in the heroic ethos, but it seems that religious poetry has adapted it to its own purposes, using it as a marker of the depersonalised tone characteristic of God and his representatives. The use of a similar pattern by Elene when she is threatening the wise men and Judas thus makes better sense:

Tunc beata Helena jubet illos omnes igni tradi. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 7)⁶⁹

þæt eow in beorge bæl fornimeð,
hattost heaðowelma, ond eower hra bryttað,
lacende lig, þæt eow sceal þæt leas
apundrad weorðan to woruldgedale. [my italics] (*Elene*, 578–81)⁷⁰

tantum ostende mihi, qui vocatur Calvarie locus. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 8)⁷¹

Pu scealt geagninga
wisdom onwreon, swa gewritu secgaþ,

⁶⁷ 'Fire shall punish that: brimstone and black flames, bitterly and ferociously, burning and violent for a heathen people.'

⁶⁸ 'Death shall take your soul away from your breast for that deed.'

⁶⁹ 'Then the blessed Helena commanded that they should all be cast in the fire.'

⁷⁰ 'That fire will take hold of you on the hill, an intense and burning heat, a turbulent flame will destroy your bodies, so that that lie shall earn you separation from this world.' [my italics]

⁷¹ 'Only show me the place called Calvary.'

A Lack of Subjectivity?

æfter stedewange hwær seo stow sie
Caluarie, ær þec cwealm nime [my italics] (*Elene*, 673b–676)⁷²

The patterns shown in italics have no equivalent in the source. If the context were different, one might think that *Elene* is not keen to accept responsibility for such violence. In fact, the threat is not euphemised but solemnised. By using inanimate subjects (as well as a passive structure in the first excerpt) that background her own role as an agent, *Elene* is taking her speech closer to the proverbial mode and thus closer to divine speeches as well, which can only endow her own words with greater authority.

In the specific context of the poem, the excerpts above also find an echo in a truly proverbial passage in the epilogue:

Swa a þeos world eall gewiteð,
ond eac swa some þe hire on wurdon
atydrede, tionleg nimeð,
ðonne dryhten sylf dom geseceð
engla weorude. Sceall æghwylc ðær
reordberendra riht gehyran
dæda gehwylcra þurh þæs deman muð (*Elene*, 1277–83)⁷³

Elene's pseudo-proverbial threat can then be understood as a prefiguration of the truly eschatological (and proverbial) development at the end of the poem. The tone of the saint thus contributes to the tight network of typological readings woven into the narrative.

Predictions

The examples above clearly show the expression of fate and divine judgement to be privileged moments for the use of objectivised enunciation. A close examination of prophetic speeches reveals further instances of pseudo-proverbiality.⁷⁴ The passage about Ishmael's destiny, in *Genesis A*, is a representative example:

dixitque ei angelus Domini revertere ad dominam tuam et humiliare
sub manibus ipsius et rursum multiplicans inquit multiplicabo semen
tuum et non numerabitur prae multitudine

⁷² 'You must reveal clearly that knowledge, according to what the Scriptures say about the place where Calvary is, *before violent death takes you*' [my italics].

⁷³ 'Thus for this world will disappear completely and forever and, similarly, a destructive fire will take away some who were born there, when the lord himself will go to Judgement with the host of his angels. There, each of the shield bearers shall hear from the mouth of the Judge the truth about all the deeds performed'.

⁷⁴ See for instance the speech about Isaac's birth (*Genesis A*, 2334b–2337), those about the fate awaiting Adam and Eve if they sin (*Genesis B*, 405–6a and 430–2a). Some aspects of the 'be fruitful and multiply' speech to Noah in *Genesis A* also show some similar features. See also *Elene* (448–53), concerning the fate awaiting the Jews if the Cross is found, and *Beowulf* (2031–66), about the fate awaiting Freawaru and Ingeld (although whether this passage is prophetic or not is debatable).

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ac deinceps ecce ait concepisti et paries filium vocabisque nomen eius
Ismahel eo quod audierit Dominus adflictionem tuam
hic erit ferus homo manus eius contra omnes et manus omnium contra
eum et e regione universorum fratrum suorum figet tabernacula
(Gen. XVI.9–12)⁷⁵

Ne ceara þu feor heonon fleame dælan
somwist incre, ac þu sece eft,
earna þe ara, eaðmod ongin
dreogan æfter dugeðum, wes drihtenhold.
þu scealt, Agar, Abrahame sunu
on woruld bringan. Ic þe wordum nu
minum secge, *þæt se magorinc sceal*
mid yldum wesan Ismahel haten.
Se bið unhyre, orlæggifre,
and wiðerbrecra wera cneorissum,
magum sinum; hine monige on
wraðe winnað mid wæpenþræce.
Of þam frumgaran folc awæcniað,
þeod unmæte. Gewit þu þinne eft
waldend secan; wuna þam þe agon! [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2281–95)⁷⁶

As usual, the Old English text of *Genesis A* follows the source closely. Some changes, however, are significant. Unlike the Vulgate, *Genesis A* draws a very sharp contrast between two enunciation modes. At the heart of the speech, most of the prediction is phrased like a maxim: use of the present tense, absence of markers referring to the situation of utterance and its actors (in particular, references to Hagar's sorrow and to her role in naming the child have disappeared),⁷⁷ presence of *sculan* and *bið*. The only missing proverbial element is the use of

⁷⁵ 'The lord's angel said to her: "Go back to your mistress and bow under her hands." And he said again, "I will multiply your descent and it will be too numerous to count." And he said further, "Here you have conceived and you will bear a son and you will call him with the name Ishmael for the lord has heard of your sorrow. He will be a savage man and his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hands will be against him, and he will pitch his tent in an area far from all his brothers."'

⁷⁶ 'Take care not to break apart your household by your flight far from here, but go back there, deserve honours, get to work for good things, be faithful to your lord. You shall, Hagar, bring a son of Abraham to the world. With my words now I am telling you that *the young man shall be called Ishmael among men. He will be savage, eager for fighting and an opponent for generations of men, for his kin; many will fight him furiously with the force of arms. From that prince a people will be born, an immense nation.* Go back to your ruler; dwell with those to whom you belong!' [my italics]

⁷⁷ Admittedly, there may be cultural reasons for the fact that Hagar's role in naming the child is not mentioned. Though the words used are quite different, the naming of Isaac (2334b–2337) is also described as an action performed by the community rather than by the parents themselves. Similarly, in *Beowulf* (2802–8), the protagonist does not tell Wiglaf to call the place where he will be buried *Biowulfes biorh*, but only asks him to have the mount erected, so that sailors will call it so, which, again, suggests that the name is not supposed to be given by the author but by common practice.

an indefinite subject. The speech is not about a type of person, as in maxims (the one who thinks well, the one who does not acknowledge God, etc.), but about a specific individual, Ishmael. Yet that essential difference is attenuated as references to Ishmael are backgrounded. The pseudo-proverbial mode is made all the more effective through the use of an envelope pattern.⁷⁸ The repetition of the injunction to go back home to form that pattern is not the only change effected by the poet. The addition of several markers typical of the discursive mode (the proximal deictic *heonon*, the vocative *Agar* and the speech preface in the first person *Ic þe wordum nu / minum secge*, 'I am telling you now with my words') sharpens the contrast between the centre and the frame of the pattern.

The use of an envelope pattern with contrasted enunciation modes is undoubtedly an effective way to highlight the extraordinary nature of the truth delivered. It also suggests a rather close connection between the pseudo-proverbial prediction and the discursive envelope. In other words, the pseudo-proverbial passage is not fully autonomous. The direct transition from a disembodied prediction to an order strongly anchored in the situation of utterance suggests that the prophetic speech is perceived as directly interpretable and relevant to the present situation. There is no massive shift towards a fully objectivised speech, valued as such, but rather a punctual use, within discourse, of a strongly evocative enunciation mode.

Conclusion

Old English poetry undeniably uses devices that attenuate and sometimes efface subjectivity altogether. Maxims are still very prestigious in the Anglo-Saxon period and may be used in poetry to teach important truths (particularly in hagiographic and homiletic texts) or to supply a commentary of the action (especially in *Beowulf*). Maxims are remarkable in that, on the one hand, they express a truth perceived both as absolute and as belonging to the community. They may be used to great effect in Direct Speech, but they are not peculiar to it. On the other hand, pseudo-proverbiality, i.e. the use of a more diffuse objectivised style, is a typical feature of Direct Speech. It occurs especially in the context of divine retribution and, more generally, to refer to the future. On several occasions, the use of that style, evocative of a superior, maybe even divine truth, produces very meaningful effects and a good understanding of its connection to true proverbiality is indispensable in order to avoid

⁷⁸ See Stévanovitch, *La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, vol. 2, p. 598.

misunderstandings in some difficult cases, for instance with the threats uttered by Elene.

One should not, however, overestimate the weight of that phenomenon, which only occurs in a limited set of contexts. No speech is ever phrased exclusively in that style. Objectivised passages – whether proverbial or pseudo-proverbial – are always part of larger units and it is often the juxtaposition of two distinct modes that produces meaning (for instance when an order follows a maxim) rather than the use of an objectivised mode in itself. As such, it seems unlikely that such passages could be responsible for the general impression of impersonality evinced by Old English poetic speeches. However, it is entirely possible that such passages fit in so easily in Old English poetic speeches precisely because the subjectivity of those speeches is already problematic for other reasons.

Archetypal Subjectivity

Direct Speech is typically couched in the discursive mode and thus full of markers of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. By and large, Old English poetry follows that rule, but the way it uses such markers is so peculiar, from our own modern perspective, that the speeches, to us, tend not to seem very subjective. This chapter takes a closer look at some of the most important markers of (inter)subjectivity, namely axiological terms, references to persons and pragmatic markers.

Axiological Terms

Axiological terms are words (most often nouns and adjectives) that express a value judgement. Theoretically, they are most typical of the subjective enunciation modes (discourse and storytelling), but in Old English poetry they are present everywhere. In fact, maxims are among the most ‘objectivised’ Old English texts, but their whole point is to pass judgement on human action. However, that judgement is not based on individual evaluation but on a set of collective norms that are perceived as absolute truths. As a consequence, axiological terms in maxims are not markers of speaker involvement, i.e. of subjectivity in the usual sense.

The same diagnosis can be made for most if not all axiological terms in Old English poetry. Consider for instance Beowulf’s recounting of King Hrethel’s grief:

Wæs þam yldestan ungedefelice
 mæges dædum morþorbed stred,
 syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
 his freawine, flane geswencte,
 miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
 broðor oðerne blodigan gare.
 Þæt wæs feohleas gefeoht, fyrenum gesyngad,
 hreðre hygemeðe; sceolde hwæðre swa þeah
 æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan. (*Beowulf*, 2435–43)¹

¹ ‘For the eldest, and that was not right, a deathbed was prepared through a kinsman’s action, as Hæðcyn, with his bow, hurt him with an arrow, his dear lord; he missed his

This is one of the few instances when Direct Speech slips into the historical mode for a little while.² Beowulf is speaking to his men, but there is no sign of his involvement or their presence in the speech. Strong axiological terms are used, but they do not seem to reflect an individual point of view. The word *gedefe*, on which *ungedefelice* is based, does not refer to what is good according to one's conscience, but to what is fitting according to the rules laid out by society.³ Additionally, the numerous references to the kinship between the killer and the victim, culminating in the simple and effective *broðor oðerne*, suggest that the judgement passed on that death does not come from the speaker, but from the facts themselves, which are inescapable. The paronomasia *feohleas gefeoht*,⁴ which draws attention to the fact that *feoh* is normally intrinsically part of *gefeoh*, contributes to the same strategy: the act is represented as unnatural in and of itself independently of anyone's opinion. The point of view evinced by the text is not represented as contingent or personal but as the only possible one.

The values expressed in Old English religious poems may not be quite the same as those expressed in *Beowulf*, but they also tend to be presented as an integral part of the world as it is and not as the product of an individual's evaluation. There are several explanations for that collective and normative use of axiological terms.

First, the fact that natural phenomena and human behaviours are discussed in the same way in gnomic poetry suggests that, epistemologically, there is no fundamental difference between the two in the Anglo-Saxon worldview. As such, it seems logical that adjectives such as 'unfair' or 'glorious' should be treated in the same way as 'warm' or 'round', i.e. as something directly observable and not as the product of a personal opinion.

Second, it is worth remembering that, even in modern discourse, axiological terms, and also many terms that are not obviously axiological, typically express a collective norm as well as a personal judgement. According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni, to say that a house is 'big', for instance, is to make a personal judgement based both on observation and on what the speaker perceives as being the norm for the size of a house.⁵ Kerbrat-Orecchioni is more interested in how the individual

target and shot his kinsman: a brother struck the other with a bloody projectile. It was a fight without compensation, a criminal act, cruel for the heart; yet the nobleman had to lose his life without being avenged.'

² See Chapter 3, n. 13.

³ Bosworth and Toller's dictionary translates *gedefe* as 'becoming', 'fit' and 'proper'. It also gives the Latin equivalents *congruus* ('conform', 'fitting'), *conueniens* ('in harmony') and *decens* ('proper'). 'Ge-dēfe', *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* <<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/014043>> (last accessed October 2011).

⁴ On that trope in Old English poetry, see Frank, 'Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse'.

⁵ Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *L'Énonciation*, pp. 97–100.

interprets the norm than in the norm itself, but that (socially defined) norm is an important aspect of the process. The use of a language shared by many to pass judgement on something always implies a degree of collective, and not just individual, evaluation.

Several aspects of Old English poetic style contribute to the reinforcement of that collective dimension. The use of formulaic collocations promotes the association of pairs of concepts. Thus the phrases *frea mihtig* ('powerful prince'), *witig drihten* ('wise lord') and *mære þeoden* ('illustrious prince') specify the attributes expected of a leader. To use them is not to describe the specific attributes of a given person or character but rather to identify them with a norm sanctioned by the community. Each new use of such phrases reinforces the norm at the same time as it passes judgement on the individual.

More indirectly, Old English poetry's taste for strong contrasts (light versus darkness, bliss versus torments, etc.) also contributes to a very normative outlook as it precludes nuances. For every quality, it seems that there are only ever two options available: the norm and its rejection. When a Latin source has an ambivalent character, the Old English poet is usually keen to cast the character into a more sharply defined role.⁶ When the source is neutral, the poet is also apt to intensify contrasts, as in the scene depicting Andreas entering prison:

Pa wæs orlege eft onhrered,
niwan stefne. Nið upp aras
oþðæt sunne gewat to sete glidan
under niflan næs. Niht helmade,
brunwann oferbræd beorgas steape,
ond se halga wæs to hofe læded,
deor ond domgeorn, in þæt dimme ræced;
sceal þonne in neadcofan nihtlangne fyrst
wærfæst wunian wic unsyfre. (*Andreas*, 1302–10)⁷

Whereas the Greek text soberly presents facts,⁸ the Old English poem constructs a binary world, in which a representative of what is Good (*se halga, deor ond domgeorn, wærfæst*) is unfairly precipitated into a hellish world: the prison is not only dark and underground, but it is referred

⁶ See Chapter 6, n. 53.

⁷ 'Then the conflict was stirred up once again. The hostility rose until the sun set, gliding under the deep cliff. The night covered everything, threw a dark shadow on the steep hills and the holy one was led to the building, brave and eager for honour, in that dark abode; then during one night the faithful man has to stay in prison, an impure dwelling.'

⁸ Boenig translates the corresponding passage as 'When evening came, they led him again into the prison, bound his hands behind, and constrained him until the morrow' (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 18). There is no equivalent in the *recensio casanatensis*, which summarises § 25 and 26 into a single sentence.

to by phrases strongly evocative of hell.⁹ The text is thus strongly axiological, but it attaches the two objects described to two extreme concepts, Good and Evil, whose characteristics are defined not by the poet or the narrator but by the poetic tradition itself. Axiological terms are therefore potentially interesting for what they reveal of prevalent norms at the time the poems were composed, but they do not constitute markers of subjectivity in the usual sense.

Persons

For Benveniste,¹⁰ the grammatical person is a problematic concept because it suggests that the third person is on a par with the first and second, when in fact its status is entirely different. The first person refers to the speaker, while the second refers to the addressee, who is also a potential speaker. In other words, they are persons in the strongest sense of the word: entities endowed with intent and a capacity for language. Those persons are also deictics, i.e. their referents can only be identified from the situation of utterance. Those characteristics set them apart from the third person, which typically designates someone (or something) exterior to the situation of utterance: whether because they are absent, because they are mere objects or because they are not interacted with, and are thus, in a sense, treated as if they were not real persons at all. Furthermore, the reference of a third-person marker may be identified from the textual context and not necessarily from the situation of utterance. It is interesting to note that that difference is reflected in the grammar of Old English poetry: third-person pronouns are entirely optional – and their use is thus emphatic – whereas first- and second-person pronouns are almost systematically expressed, even when the verb form is unambiguous.¹¹

The fundamental difference in status between the different grammatical persons explains why the third person is typically associated with distanced, objective utterances, whereas the first and second persons are intrinsically connected to subjective and intersubjective ones. Apart from the few objectivised passages discussed in the previous chapter, Direct Speech in Old English poetry is typically quite rich

⁹ The phrases used here (*dimme ræced*, *wic unsyfre*) echo numerous references to hell as a 'bad home' in Old English poetry, e.g. *ðeostræ ham*, 'dark home' (*Christ and Satan*, 38a); *þam engan ham*, 'that cruel home' (*Elene*, 920a); *hamas on heolstrum*, 'homes in darkness' (*Guthlac A*, 83a). Such phrases are often used to contrast hell with heaven, the 'good home': *ecne geard*, 'eternal dwelling' (*Guthlac A*, 791a); *hihtfulne ham*, 'a home full of hope' (*Genesis A*, 946a); *halgan ham*, 'a holy home' (*Andreas*, 1683a), etc.

¹⁰ Benveniste, 'La nature des pronoms'.

¹¹ Stévanovitch, 'Le sujet de troisième personne dans la poésie vieil-anglaise', p. 25.

with first and second-person markers. The use of a mere pronoun is the default choice, but it is not the only option.

Pronouns Followed by a Complement

In Old English poetry, first- and second-person pronouns may be followed by a complement, either immediately or at some distance:

vocavit autem Abimelech etiam Abraham et dixit ei quid fecisti
nobis quid peccavimus in te quia induxisti super me et super regnum
meum peccatum grande quae non debuisti facere fecisti nobis
(Gen. XX.9)¹²

Bu ellþeodig usic woldest
on þisse folcsceare facne besyrwan,
synnum besmitan [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2680–2a)¹³

‘Eow het secgan sigedrihten min,
aldor Eastdena, þæt he eower æpelu can,
ond ge him syndon ofer sæwylmas
heardhicgende hider wilcuman.
Nu ge moton gangan in eowrum guðgeatawum
under heregriman Hroðgar geseon [my italics] (*Beowulf*, 391–6)¹⁴

In the extract from *Genesis A*, the adjective (without any equivalent in the Vulgate) is placed just after the pronoun and together they constitute a half-line.¹⁵ Neither metre nor punctuation (which almost amounts to the same thing in Junius 11, as the punctuation is essentially metrical in that manuscript) suggests any break between the two elements. It is therefore tempting to consider that the adjective is attributive, the postmodifying position being quite standard for such adjectives in Old English.¹⁶ By contrast, in the extract from *Beowulf*, the adjective (originally a present participle) is located at some distance, and thus more likely to be interpreted as appositive.

However, the paucity of punctuation and the flexibility of the Old English word order call for caution. While there is undeniably a difference between the two patterns, it is probably excessive to consider

¹² ‘Abimelech called for Abraham again and said to him: “Why have you done that to us? How have we sinned against you for you to bring on me and my realm a great sin? What you should not have done you have done against us.”’

¹³ ‘*You who are a foreigner*, you have wanted to trick us deceitfully in this nation, to defile us with sins’ [my italics].

¹⁴ ‘My victorious lord, the prince of the East-Danes, commands me to tell you that he knows your noble kin and that for him *you* are welcome people, coming here over the waves, *bold in purpose*. Now you may go wearing your war equipment and your helmets to see Hrothgar’ [my italics].

¹⁵ Similar instances may be found in the same poem, 2818a and 2822a.

¹⁶ See Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, vol. 1, § 160. Mitchell notes that this creates difficulties in determining whether an adjective is attributive, predicative or appositive.

they belong to entirely different categories. In both cases, after all, a pronoun is postmodified by an adjective. Fischer's work on the position of the adjective and its connection with iconicity may shed some light on the issue: for her, weak prenominal adjectives are inseparable from the noun and together 'they form the "theme" of the utterance',¹⁷ whereas postnominal adjectives are more like predicative adjectives and convey rhematic information. The difference is iconic in that the word order directly mirrors the order in which the information is processed.

That interpretation is confirmed by the fact that it is possible to use an adjective after a first- or second-person pronoun: the pronoun is sufficient to identify the referent; therefore the adjective can only bring additional information.¹⁸ If the key is iconicity, however, it seems reasonable to think that there is a continuum between premodifying adjectives (thematic), close postmodifying adjectives (rather rhematic) and distant postmodifying adjectives (very rhematic).

The closer the adjective is to the pronoun, the more likely it seems that the target of the speech is not the addressee as such, in their entirety, but rather one of the addressee's roles, or masks.¹⁹ In other words, when Abimelech addresses Abraham as '*þu ellþeodig*', he is not addressing Abraham as an individual, rich and complex, but as a partner in a very specific social relationship, namely that between a lord and a foreigner under his protection. As such, the postmodification has an argumentative function: it highlights the jarring discrepancy between what Abraham has done and what was expected from him as a guest in a foreign court.

In the extract from *Beowulf* above, the argumentative function is not entirely absent: the Geats's determination is part of what earns them a favourable welcome. *Heardhigende* does not specify an actual social role, but it does define the Geats as true heroes, through their thoughts and actions, and they are welcome as heroes. The argumentative effect of the adjective is mitigated in several ways, however. First of all, another element – the Geats's kin being known – has already been put forward to justify Hrothgar's decision. Second, the position of the adjective means that it is not an essential part of the reference to the addressee, but rather a circumstantial element, therefore more peripheral to the issue at stake.

¹⁷ Fischer, 'The Position of the Adjective in (Old) English From an Iconic Perspective', p. 271.

¹⁸ Witness also the possibility to have a noun phrase just after the pronoun, which also suggests a predicative structure, as in *Genesis A*, 1901b: *þu min suhterga* ('you [who are] my nephew').

¹⁹ 'Mask' is used here to designate the role played by someone in society, the image they give of themselves to others. See Goffman, in particular *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Many adjectives (and occasionally noun phrases) may be used to postmodify a second-person pronoun, but they have something in common: they do not provide insight into the emotional attitude of the speaker towards the addressee but into the addressee's status with respect to the speaker (and occasionally to other characters involved in the interaction). The lexical content of the word chosen does not always make that fact obvious, but close examination of the context usually confirms it, as in this example from *Guthlac A*:

þær ge gnornende
deað sceolon dreogan, ond ic dreama wyn
agan mid englum in þam uplican
rodera rice (*Guthlac A*, 679b–682a)²⁰

After the demons have threatened Guthlac with hell, the hermit responds by reminding them of their own fall. At first sight, the present participle used to postmodify the pronoun seems to refer to an emotional state. However, its significance is not merely psychological. The demons' suffering is a reminder of their position in the order of the world – while Guthlac belongs to the kingdom of heaven (*in þam uplican / rodera rice*), the demons are for ever condemned to suffer in hell (*þær*). Their suffering is the visible evidence that they belong to the losing side – those who made the wrong decision and are now facing its consequences. As in the previous examples, the postmodifier has thus an argumentative function.

Second-person pronoun postmodifiers, especially when they are very close to the pronoun, define the addressee more than they characterise them. In other words, their main function is not to add tidbits of information that might gradually help to construct a complex character, but rather to clarify the status of the addressee (especially with respect to the speaker) and the issue(s) at stake in the context of the interaction. One may be reminded of Whallon's analysis of formulaic epithets in heroic poetry:

[W]hile the formulaic epithets for the heroes of the *Iliad* are true to individual character but indifferently appropriate to context, the formulaic kennings for the heroes of *Beowulf* are true to generic character but significantly appropriate to context.²¹

With second-person pronoun postmodifiers as with formulaic epithets, the emphasis is not on the individual but on the generic character in a specific context.

²⁰ 'There you [who are] groaning shall have to experience death, and I shall have the bliss of joys among angels in the heavenly kingdom above'.

²¹ Whallon, 'Formulas for Heroes in the *Iliad* and in *Beowulf*', p. 96.

First-person pronoun postmodifiers behave similarly, for the most part. They may be found at varying distances from the pronoun they modify and they may very well have an argumentative function, as when the demon is pleading Juliana for a truce, referring to himself as *me þearfendum* (449b, 'needy me' or 'poor me'). The type of information provided is not exactly the same, however. Unsurprisingly, there is less emphasis on the relationship with the addressee: the information is relevant to the situation but not necessarily to the interaction with the addressee. There is also comparatively more emphasis on physical and emotional sensations: see Beowulf's reference to his wounds (2740a) or Andreas's disciples' reference to their sorrow if they were to be parted from their leader (405–7), for instance. However, such elements cannot be confused with true introspection or subjectivity. They do not represent various shades of emotion, each peculiar to a specific individual at a specific moment. The only emotion ever represented is anguish and its expression is largely conventional, corresponding to, in the words of Pasternack, 'a traditional position' rather than 'a viewpoint peculiar to that person's personality and experience'.²²

Predicative Structures

The addressee and the speaker are occasionally identified explicitly through the use of the copula *eart* / *eom* / *sindon*. There are about fifteen instances of that predicative structure in the second person in the corpus examined here, and about ten more in other narrative poems, particularly in *Daniel*.²³ It is rather a lot considering how cumbersome the structure is. In most cases, the pattern is used either to praise or to condemn, usually in a markedly religious context:

Cweþað ealle þus:
'Pu eart hæleða helm and heofendema,
engla ordfruma, and eorðan tudor
up gelæddest to þissum eadigan ham.' (*Christ and Satan*, 655b–658)²⁴

²² Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, p. 45. She writes about *The Wanderer*: 'But whereas normally a modern first person presents what is supposed to be a viewpoint peculiar to that person's personality and experience, the manuscript sequence gives voice to a traditional position, the speech taking its content and its expressions from the formulaic theme of exile.'

²³ *Beowulf* (2813–14a); *Andreas* (505b–508a, 527b–528, 676–7, 744–6a); *Elene* (808b–809a, 814b–815); *Juliana* (93–96a); *Guthlac A* (9b–10a, 272b, 478a, 579–82a, 623a); *Christ and Satan* (57b–58, 439b–440, 656–7). Other instances are found in *Daniel* (283b–284a, 286–8a, 330–2, 405b–408, 563b–565 and 608–9); *Azarias* (5–6a and 46–8); and *The Descent into Hell* (76 and 108b); as well as in a number of less narrative texts such as *Soul and Body*, *Solomon and Saturn*, *The Phoenix*, *Christ I*. The pattern is most commonly found in the Psalms and prayers, however.

²⁴ 'They speak all thus: "You are the protector of men and the heavenly judge, the creator of angels, and you have led the earthly offspring to this blessed home."'

O vos miserrimi quare sequimini et ambulatis cum ipso qui dicit quia dei filius sum, et quis est qui dicitur quia deus filium habet? (*recensio casanatensis*, § 12)²⁵

‘Hwæt, ge syndon earme ofer ealle menn!
Wadað widlastas, weorn geferað
earfoðsiða (*Andreas*, 676–8a)²⁶

The passage from *Christ and Satan* is a celebration of God by the martyrs dwelling in heaven, whereas the extract from *Andreas* is an accusation levelled by the high priest against Jesus’ apostles. Neither passage is nuanced or subtle. From the beginning of the speech, the speaker and their addressees are firmly assigned to one side of the conflict between Good and Evil, which contributes to the sharp polarisation typical of hagiographic poetry.²⁷ The device is made the most of in *Guthlac A*, as the two factions repeatedly accuse each other using predicative structures. The lack of nuance makes the truth shine brighter and the blatant lies appear even more despicable. The preference for the form *eart / sindon* over *bist / beoþ* suggests that such comments are not about expressing a universal and eternal truth, but something that is true and valid right now, when it is uttered.

There is something dramatic to the device. It is especially obvious when a revelation is followed by predicative praise. It is as if the character was conveying their own experience to the audience,²⁸ making perceptible what could not possibly be perceived otherwise: both because Old English poetic descriptions are not detailed enough to allow for visualisation and because divine presence – which is a common object of such praise in the extant Old English poetry – cannot possibly be represented directly. Eve’s praise of Jesus as Creator in *Christ and Satan* is a particularly striking example:

Ræhte þa mid handum to heofencyninge,
bæd meotod miltse þurh Marian had:
‘Hwæt, þu fram minre dohtor, drihten, onwoce
in middangeard mannum to helpe.

²⁵ ‘O, how miserable you are! Why do you follow and walk with that same man who says “I am the son of God” and who is it who says that God has a son?’ The Latin text is apparently quite close to the Greek source, which Boenig (*The Acts of Andrew*) translates as ‘O miserable ones, why do you walk with the one saying “I am the Son of God”? Now God does not have a son, does he?’

²⁶ ‘Listen! You are miserable above all men! You wander widely, undergo many hardships’.

²⁷ See above, especially the end of Chapter 2. Such polarisation is also found in other religious texts: see Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 185, concerning its use in Metre 1 of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy*.

²⁸ On that didactic function of the character conveying their own experience through speech, see also Chapter 2, ‘Commentaries outside *Beowulf*’ (pp. 90–4).

Nu is gesene þæt ðu eart sylfa god
and ece ordfruma ealra gesceafta.' (*Christ and Satan*, 435–40)²⁹

Eve's words – meant to be uttered in turn by the person reading the poem aloud – actualise God's presence and his identity with Christ. It is as if the addressee was made present when the poem is performed. When the addressee is God, the performative power of the predicative structure thus takes on a sacred dimension, not unlike the liturgy of the Eucharist where the concrete presence of God is invoked through the repetition of Christ's words during the Last Supper.³⁰

There is good reason to think that the use of that pattern for praise (particularly praise of God) reflects Latin influence, albeit indirectly. In some rare instances, the use of that pattern in a narrative poem is directly copied from the Latin source:

In veritate, Christe, tu es Salvator mundi (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 10)³¹

Nu ic þurh soð hafu seolf gecnawen
on heardum hige þæt ðu hælend eart
middangeardes. (*Elene*, 807–9a)³²

Much more often, though, the pattern occurs in Old English narrative poems when there is nothing comparable in the source. Examination of the whole poetic corpus shows that there is more to the story, however. The pattern is most commonly found in Psalms and prayers, often literally translated from the Latin. It is extremely likely that the main influence is the Bible: the Psalms, of course, but also the Gospels.³³ The context in which the pattern occurs is almost exclusively that of divine praise. The only remarkable difference between Latin and Old English uses is that in Latin the use of the personal pronoun in *tu es* is not required and therefore much more emphatic. This might explain why the Psalms in the Vulgate sometimes show fewer instances of the pattern than their Old English counterparts, where the use of a personal pronoun is standard and thus somewhat less conspicuous. It is worth noting that Old Saxon shows a very comparable use of the

²⁹ 'Then she reached out with her hands towards the king of heaven, asked for divine grace through Mary's person: "O lord, through my daughter you were born on earth as a help to men. Now it is clear that you are God himself and the origin of all creation."'

³⁰ See Matt. XXVI.26–28, Mark XIV.22–24 and Luke XXII.19–20.

³¹ 'In truth, Christ, you are the saviour of the world'.

³² 'Now in truth I have understood myself in my obstinate mind that you are the saviour of the earth.' See also *Andreas*, 526–8 (*recensio casanatensis*, § 9).

³³ See Psalms XXX.4, XXXI.7, XXXVIII.8, XLIII.5, LXII.2, LXX.5, LXX.6, LXXV.5, LXXVI.15, LXXXVIII.XVIII, LXXXIX.2, XCII.2 and CXVIII.114. On one occasion (CIX.4), the pattern is used by God to address a king who is acknowledged as a priest. In the Gospels, the pattern is used to address God: Matt. XVI.16; Mark I.11, III.12, VIII.29 and XIV.61; Luke III.22, IV.41; John I.49, VI.70 and XI.27.

pattern as instances of *thu bist* in *Heliand* also occur in the context of divine praise.³⁴

The origin of the use of the predicative pattern for condemnation may have to be found elsewhere, however, perhaps in the Germanic tradition. In Old Norse, *þú ert* and *ertu* frequently occur in antagonistic contexts, often to insult the addressee:

Ær ertu, Oddrún, oc ørvita (*Oddrúnargrátr*, § 11, 1–2)³⁵

Qlr ertu, Geirroðr, hefr þú ofdrucit (*Grímnismál*, § 51, 1–2)³⁶

Even when Odin's wisdom is acknowledged by *Vafthrudnir*, there is no comparison possible with the Latin praise pattern:

Frôðr ertu nú, gestr, far þú á becc iotuns (*Vafðrúðnismál*, § 19, 1–2)³⁷

Nú ec við Óðin deildac mína orðspeki,
þú ert æ vísastr vera. (*Vafðrúðnismál*, § 55, 7–9)³⁸

This is no adoration of an almighty God, as in the Bible – an opponent is being assessed and eventually found worthy of praise. Odin's superiority is acknowledged at the end of the poem, but the antagonists faced each other as equals and Odin also acknowledged the giant's wisdom in the course of their interaction (*þú ert alsviðr, iotunn*, 'you are wise concerning everything, giant', § 34). The confrontation is more polite than in many other instances, but it is still a confrontation.

The evidence is too slim for a strong case to be made, especially as the Old English pattern is not very distinctive, as the use of the personal pronoun is not emphatic, but one may wonder whether the few aggressive predicative structures found in Old English poetry do not have their origin in a Germanic poetic convention still evidenced in Norse texts. The use of predicative structures in Old English poetry would thus appear as the conflation of two different models: a Germanic one focused on confrontation and a Latin one focused on religious praise.

Similarly, several competing models were available to poets for first-person predicative structures. That structure can be used by the speaker to make known their status or their kin. It is thus used on four occasions when *Beowulf* and his men are gaining access to *Hrothgar's*

³⁴ See for instance *Heliand*, 3057–8: "“*Thu bist thie uaro*” quat Petrus, “*uualdandes suno, / libbiandes godes, the thit liot giscop*”’ (‘You are the true, said Peter, son of the Ruler, of the living God, who created the light’). See also *Heliand*, 259, 487, 973, 1600–2, 3565–6, 3801 and 4975.

³⁵ ‘You are mad, Oddrun, and senseless’.

³⁶ ‘You are drunk, Geirroð! You have drunk too much’.

³⁷ ‘Wise you are now, guest, come to the giant’s bench’.

³⁸ ‘Now I have confronted the wisdom of my words with Odin. You are ever the wisest.’

court (260–1, 335b–336a, 342b–343a, 407b–408a) and there are somewhat comparable instances in *Andreas* (323b–324a), *Guthlac A* (314b, 599–600a, 703–4a and 708b–710) and *Genesis A* (1900b–1904a).³⁹ In *Beowulf*, the self-definitions occur at the beginning of a new exchange, when the identity of the speaker is not yet fully known to the addressee.⁴⁰ They constitute a first official contact and allow the speaker to claim a name and status in front of their addressee. That initial speech act is also a way for the character to take on a form, or rather a voice, for the audience – what was only an insubstantial shade described by a narrator claims existence in the here and now of the oral performance. There are similar instances of that performative use in Eddic poems, which suggests it may have been a conventional feature of Germanic oral poetry more widely.⁴¹

The device does not merely attribute existence to the character – it gives them a specific existence, i.e. it defines them. In some cases, the definition can be very elaborate (almost as much as in riddles, where the device is commonly used).⁴² In *Beowulf*, it is used to powerful dramatic effect and Orchard rightly notes that ‘Beowulf’s own approach to Heorot is every bit as stylised as that of Grendel.’⁴³ Each of the three steps in the character’s entrance is more precise and individualised than the previous one, following an incremental pattern.⁴⁴ The character is first introduced as a warrior by the narrator, while he describes himself and his companions as Hygelac’s thanes and states his own kin (258–6). Then, he is referred to as the leader of the Geats by the narrator while he states again the identity of his group as Hygelac’s thanes and gives his own name (340–7). On the third and last occasion, in front of the king of the Danes, Beowulf is referred to by the narrator through his own name and speaks for himself, relinquishing *we* for *ic* (405–25).

In other cases, the device is perhaps less dramatic, but very rhetorically effective nonetheless. Stating one’s identity is not just providing a name, but also claiming certain prerogatives – and that potential is tapped in several poems. In *Andreas*, the saint’s claim that he and

³⁹ See also *Battle of Finnsburh*, 24; and perhaps *Battle of Maldon*, 317.

⁴⁰ The same is true for *Battle of Finnsburh*, 24, though there is no actual exchange of several speeches in this case.

⁴¹ See for instance *Hárbarðsljóð*, § 8–9, *Grípisspá*, § 17 and *Alvíssmál*, § 6.

⁴² Many Old English riddles open on a first-person predicative pattern (*Riddles* 2, 15, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30, 30b, 62, 63, 66, 71, 79, 80, 81, 85 and 95). In some cases, the pattern is reiterated in the course of the riddle and plays an essential role in shaping the mysterious object. The most striking example is Riddle 40, with twenty-six instances of the pattern (about as much as in all the other riddles taken together).

⁴³ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 208.

⁴⁴ On that pattern, see Bartlett, *The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 50. Bartlett mentions Grendel’s approach as an example of that device. Grendel’s approach has been commented on at length since. See in particular Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, pp. 90–1; Greenfield, ‘Grendel’s Approach to Heorot’; and Renoir, ‘Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*’.

his companions are servants of Christ (323b–324a, *We his þegnas synd / gecoren to cempum*, ‘we are his thanes, chosen to be his soldiers’) is thus exploited to great effect. In the *Praxeis Andreou* and the *recensio casanatensis* (§ 6), Andrew humbly explains that their intent to travel without money is not due to dishonesty but to a commandment they received from Christ, after which the pilot (Jesus) accepts them on board, ostensibly because he respects their wish not to disobey their lord. In the Old English poem, Andreas’s answer is not so meek. He states first that they are Christ’s thanes and then that Christ is the one almighty ruler who governs the fates of all creatures. Christ’s command is quoted, but the argument being made is not quite the same as in the source. The pilot obviously understands that, as he gives as an additional reason for accepting them on board the fact that they are the thanes of a superior ruler (344–5, *Gif ge syndon þegnas þæs þe þrym ahof / ofer middangeard, swa ge me secgaþ*, ‘If you are the thanes of the one whose might dominates earth, as you tell me’).

Andreas is not the only poem where first-person predicative statements are used not just to make an entrance but also – and perhaps especially – to make a point. The same goes for Abraham reminding Lot that he is his uncle (*Genesis A*, 1900b–1901) before suggesting a way to settle the quarrel between their men, for Guthlac defending his status as servant of God in front of demons in *Guthlac A* (312b–318a and 592–600a), or for Bartholomew telling the demons assaulting Guthlac that he is the judge appointed by God to settle the issue in the same poem (703–4a). Even in *Beowulf* and in *The Battle of Finnsburh* (24), where the big entrance aspect is predominant, a point is being made – that the speaker has to be taken seriously.

Another model was available to Old English poets, however. In Latin religious texts, particularly in prayers, self-definitions are often used for abasement in front of God’s sublime presence. See for instance the two following examples:

Ego servus, tu dominus, ego discipulus, tu magister, ego homo, tu deus.
Ego a te creatus, tu creator, ego auditor, tu preceptor. (*recensio casanatensis*, § 18)⁴⁵

et tu Domine Domine fac mecum propter nomen tuum quia suavis misericordia tua libera me
quia egenus et pauper ego sum et cor meum turbatum est intra me
(Psalms, CVIII.21–22)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ ‘I am a slave; you are the lord; I am a disciple; you are the master; I am a man; you are God. I have been created by you; you have created me; I am listening; you are teaching.’ This passage has no equivalent in the *Praxeis Andreou* or in *Andreas*.

⁴⁶ ‘And you, lord! Lord, act for me, for the sake of your name, because your mercy is good. Release me, for I am poor and needy and my heart is troubled inside me’.

The latter example is translated rather faithfully in the Old English psalm:

And þu, min drihten god, do me þine nu
mycle mildheortnesse for þinum þam mæran naman,
swa ðu oft þin milde mod manegum cýðdest.
Alys me, lifes weard, forþan ic eom lama þearfa;
is me heorte on hearde gedrefed. (*Psalm*, 108, 61–5)⁴⁷

Comparable instances occur in other Old English psalms and in various Old English prayers.⁴⁸ The same pattern also occurs in Old Saxon narrative poetry, where predicative statements can be used by speakers to declare themselves as servants of God, as unworthy of something or as stained by sins. As in the Latin models, such statements often occur in conjunction with praise of God's greatness:

Uuarod uuilthu nu, uualdand fro min,
alomatig fadar? ik biun thin egan scalc,
hold endi gihorig. thu bist mi, erro, so guod,
medmo so mildi (*Saxon Genesis*, 168–71a)⁴⁹

'ik thes uuirdig ni bium' quathie,
'herro thie guodo, that thu an min hus cumes,
suokies mina selda, huand ik biun so sundig man
mid uuordon endi mid uuerkon. Ik gilobiu that thu giuuald habis,
that thu ina hinan maht helan giuuirkean,
uualdand fro min (*Heliand*, 2104b–2109a)⁵⁰

Surprisingly enough, there are no truly comparable examples in extant Old English narrative poems, though it is hard to determine whether that absence is merely due to the loss of many poems or to a genuine lack of interest for that model.

There are instances when characters depict themselves in a situation of weakness, but they do not show the same abasement.⁵¹ The characters stress the loss they suffered and their sorrow, in a manner typical

⁴⁷ 'And you, my lord god, act for me now with great benevolence for the sake of your illustrious name, as you have often shown your kind heart to many. Release me, guardian of life, for I am needy and weak; my heart is sorely troubled.'

⁴⁸ *Psalm* 68 (17), *Psalm* 69 (15), *Psalm* 85 (2–4), *Psalm* 101 (13–20), *Psalm* 115 (12–13), *Psalm* 118 (51–371), *Resignation* (65–109), *A Prayer* (61).

⁴⁹ 'Where do you want to go to now, my lord and ruler, almighty father? I am your own servant, faithful and obedient. You are so good, lord, to me, so generous with treasures.' Quotations from the *Saxon Genesis* are taken from Doane's edition.

⁵⁰ "'I am not worthy of this", he said, "good lord, that you should come to my house, enter my dwelling, because I am such a sinful man, in words and actions. I believe that you have the power, that you can heal him from here, my lord and ruler."' For comparable examples, see *Saxon Genesis* (64 and 228), and *Heliand* (119, 295, 931–8, 2112, 2123 and 5017).

⁵¹ See *Genesis A* (2221–33); *Juliana* (327b–328a); *Elene* (921b–924a); *Christ and Satan* (96b, 129–30, 155b–156a, 167, 176–7).

of the traditional theme of exile,⁵² but they do not humble themselves in front of God's glory. Satan's attitude in *Christ and Satan* is quite typical:

Ealle we syndon ungelice
þonne þe we iu in heofonum hæfdon ærror
wlite and weorðmynt. ... Nu ic eom dædum fah,
gewundod mid wommum; sceal nu þysne wites clom
beoran beornende in bæce minum,
hat on helle, hyhtwillan leas. (*Christ and Satan*, 149–58)⁵³

As with pronoun postmodifiers, there is no question of such statements allowing for the representation of true introspection or subjectivity. They enhance drama and pathos, but in a thoroughly conventional way.

It is undeniable that predicative structures, whether in the first or the second person, are not fortuitous. They follow highly conventional patterns and clearly fulfil rhetorical purposes. It is particularly interesting to note that the rhetorical strategies are not primarily interpersonal, i.e. they are not about the representation of one individual sharing their personal opinion of themselves or of their addressee. It rather seems that the main purpose is dramatic and performative. They allow the poet to bring the characters into existence and to cast them into recognisable stereotypical situations: the confrontation of antagonists, the humble submission of a believer in front of God, the sorrow of a lonely person.

Terms of Address

Terms of address are relatively frequent in Old English poetic speeches, though there are important disparities both between poems and within the same poem. In the corpus examined here, there is almost one term of address per speech in the whole corpus (241 for 289), but in fact the proportion is rather higher in some poems (76 for 68 speeches in *Andreas*) and much lower in others (there is not a single instance in *Guthlac A*'s 11 speeches).⁵⁴ Similarly, some speeches may have up to eight terms of address while many others have none.

⁵² See Chapter 1, n. 56.

⁵³ 'We are all unlike when we used to have beauty and honour formerly. Now I am guilty because of my deeds, wounded with corruption; now I have to carry this chain of torment, burning on my back, heat in hell deprived of hopeful desires.'

⁵⁴ Figures for all poems: *Andreas*, 76 for 68 speeches; *Beowulf*, 47 for 45 speeches; *Elene*, 35 for 40; *Juliana*, 22 for 30; *Genesis B*, 8 for 12; *Genesis A*, 41 for 62; *Christ and Satan*, 12 for 21; *Guthlac A*, 0 for 11.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

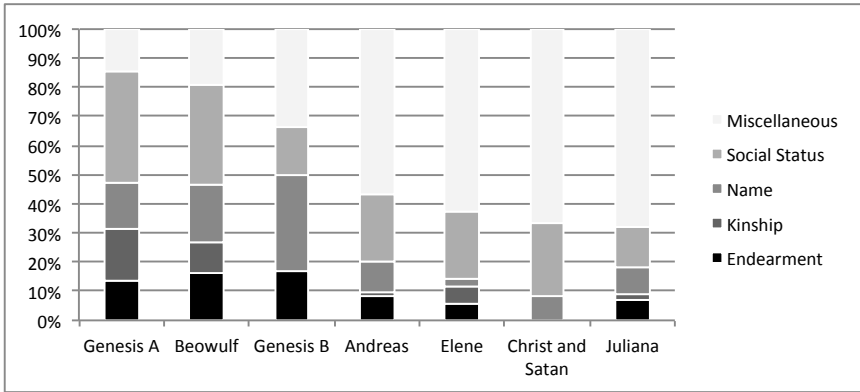


Fig 2 Types of terms of address (percentage)

WHAT THE TERMS DENOTE

Before examining more precisely the specific contexts in which terms of address are most commonly found, it is interesting to examine what kinds of phrases are used. Many terms of address fall into at least one of these four categories: personal name, social status, kinship and terms of endearment. Some fit into two categories at once, such as *wine min Adam* ('my friend Adam'), which is both a personal name and a term of endearment. Others are difficult to place into any category at all: they may refer to almost any characteristic of the addressee, often in a positive way, sometimes in a very negative one and occasionally in a perfectly neutral one.

It is interesting to note that such versatility is not common in all poems. In *Beowulf*, *Genesis A* and, perhaps, *Genesis B*,⁵⁵ most terms of address fit into one of the four categories outlined above. In the other poems (*Andreas*, *Elene*, *Christ and Satan* and *Juliana*), such phrases do occur, but they are a minority, as shown in Figures 2 and 3.⁵⁶

One might argue that it is only differing interaction contexts that cause the discrepancy. However, closer examination reveals that such is not the case. In *Beowulf* and *Genesis A*, characters are commonly referred to by name or kinship, but the thane–lord relationship is the dominant paradigm. Not only is it used when literally appropriate, but also when a child or wife is addressing the *paterfamilias*,⁵⁷ or when a believer is addressing God: in *Genesis A*, three of the seven phrases used

⁵⁵ Terms of address are too few in that poem for any apparent trend to be significant.

⁵⁶ Whenever a term of address combined elements from two categories, half a point has been attributed to each.

⁵⁷ Hrothgar is thus addressed as *freodrihten min* by Wealhtheow (*Beowulf*, 1169b), and Abraham is addressed as *drihten min* by Sarah and as *frea min* by Isaac (*Genesis A*, 2227a and 2890b). Similarly, in *Genesis B*, Eve addresses Adam as *herra se goda* (678b).

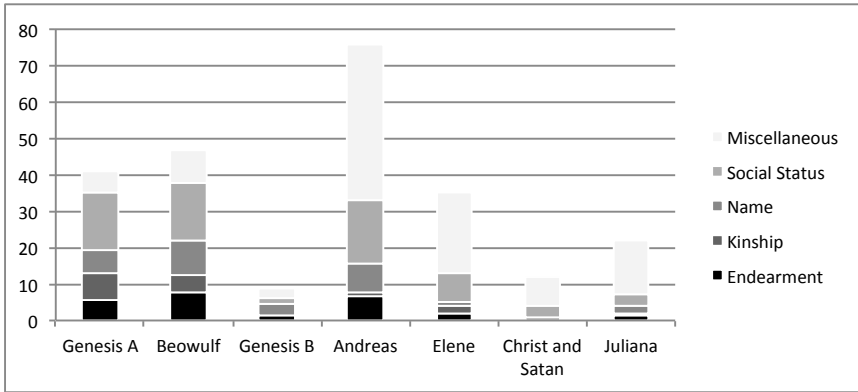


Fig 3 Types of terms of address (absolute values)

to address God unambiguously denote an ordinary thane–lord relationship (*freadrihten min*, 884b, and *þeoden*, 1035a and 2349a), whereas the rest associate the notion of suzerainty with another notion: *liffrea min* ('my life lord', 868a), *heofona heahcýning* ('high king of the sky', 1025a), *gasta waldend* ('ruler of souls', 2175b) and *engla þeoden* ('prince of angels', 2643b). Such phrases are designed specifically to address God, but they still follow the suzerainty paradigm to some extent.

In *Christ and Satan* and the hagiographic poems, the suzerainty paradigm remains present, together with personal names and terms of endearment,⁵⁸ but it is much less dominant. Thus the character of Andreas is only once addressed with a standard epithet denoting secular leadership (*wigendra hleo*, 'protector of warriors', 1672b), while on other occasions he is addressed as *þances gleaw þegn* ('clever-thinking thane', 557), *wis hæleð* ('wise man' or 'wise warrior', 624a), *maga mode rof* ('brave-minded man', 625a) and *beorn gebledsod* ('blessed man', 937a). Only the last would be at odds with the secular, heroic ethos associated with the epithets found in *Beowulf*, but none of those epithets are conventional. They seem to have been crafted specifically to refer to Andreas. It is also worth noticing that they refer to personal qualities rather than to a status or function, which takes them even further from the model represented in *Beowulf* or *Genesis A*. As for God, He may be addressed with an ordinary secular epithet as in *Genesis A*, but the poems show a dizzying array of options, many of which have nothing to do with suzerainty as such (e.g. *Christ and Satan*, 677a, *lifigendum liht*, 'light of the living'; *Juliana*, 273a, *ece ælmihtig*, 'eternal almighty'; *Andreas*, 84a, *beorht blædgifa*, 'bright giver of

⁵⁸ Kinship is much less present, on the other hand, but it is only to be expected given that it is much less thematically relevant in those texts.

prosperity').⁵⁹ Those epithets are often conventional in their own right, but they belong to the world of prayers rather than to that of secular narrative poetry.

TERMS OF ADDRESS IN OTHER GERMANIC TRADITIONS

Given that *Genesis A* and *Beowulf* are often supposed to have been composed earlier than the other poems,⁶⁰ it is tempting to assume that their terms of address reflect earlier conventions. Examination of Old Norse and Old Saxon poems strengthens that hypothesis to some extent. The three categories of personal names, kinship and function account for most of the terms of address found in Eddic poetry. Function may encompass both social status (e.g. *Njára dróttinn*, 'lord of the Níarar', *Völundarqviða*, § 30) and an action that defines the character's identity, e.g. *brjótr berg-dana* for Thor ('destroyer of giants', *Hymisqviða*, § 17). The two aspects are intrinsically close, and in Old English poetry a number of terms of status thus focus on one defining action, e.g. *sinces brytta* ('treasure-giver') or *æðelinga helm* ('protector of noblemen').

There is one important difference with Old English poetry, however. In Eddic poems, personal names are used much more frequently, usually at the beginning of a speech, and they play a crucial role in allowing the audience to understand who is speaking to whom, given that there is often no inquit.⁶¹ When information on kinship or social status is supplied, it is often in addition to the name rather than in its stead:

Teigr mic þat, Guðrún, Giúca dóttir:
mér í hóllo Herkia sagði (*Guðrúnarqviða in þriðia*, § 2, 1–4)⁶²

By contrast, Old English poetry relies on the inquit for identification, and any information provided by the term of address is ancillary. Still, terms of address are relatively often found close to the beginning of a speech in Old English poetry as well, which suggests they may have played a more fundamental role in identification at an earlier stage. It is possible that the development of the inquit has gradually freed terms of address to become more varied.

The Old Saxon corpus shares with Old English poems the reliance on inquits for identification of the speakers and addressees. Unsurprisingly, then, personal names are not as common as in Old

⁵⁹ For a full overview of references to God in Old English poetry, see Crépin, 'Poétique vieil-anglaise'.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 1, n. 152.

⁶¹ See Chapter 1 ('The Initial Inquit').

⁶² 'It saddens me, Gudrun, daughter of Giuki, what Herkia told me in the hall'.

Norse, though they do appear on occasions,⁶³ as in Old English. The other terms of address fall into the same categories as in *Beowulf* and *Genesis A*: some references to kinship (e.g. *auaron Israeles*, 'descendent of Israel', *Heliand*, 491a; *selbo suno Dauides*, 'the son of David himself', *Heliand*, 2991a), some terms of endearment (e.g. *manno liobosta*, 'dearest man', *Heliand*, 821b, and *the gôdo / thie guodo*, 'the good', associated to another term) and many references to the status of the addressee. That status can be inferior or equal to that of the speaker (e.g. *gisithos mina*, 'my companions', *Heliand*, 1389b, and *iungron mina*, 'my disciples', *Heliand*, 3039a and 3052b; *thegno besta*, 'best of thanes', *Heliand*, 3101a), but in the extant texts the character most often addressed is God, hence a huge proportion of terms denoting lordship. The words used are almost always the same: *herro*, *uualdand*, *fro* and *drohtin*, sometimes together with a first-person possessive or with the postmodifier *the gôdo*. None of those words are specific to God; they could all be applied to a secular leader.⁶⁴

Clearly, the *Saxon Genesis* (and presumably *Genesis B*), *Heliand*, *Beowulf* and *Genesis A* follow the same conventions as regards terms of address. The existence of features shared with Old Norse poems suggests a possible common Germanic heritage, though the similarities between Old English and Old Saxon were very likely reinforced by later contacts. If, as suggested by some,⁶⁵ Old Saxon biblical poetry owes much to Old English influence, then it would seem likely that *Beowulf* and *Genesis A* represent the paradigm that was dominant at the time that influence was felt, and that the taste for more varied terms of address developed later on. Seeing as Old English influence must have been felt somewhere between Boniface's mission (shortly after 722) and before *Heliand's* composition (between 821 and 840 or 850),⁶⁶ this might provide additional arguments in the debate on the dating of Old English poetry, though of course the two paradigms may very well have coexisted for an extended period of time, which makes the issue problematic.

⁶³ There might be discrepancies within the Old Saxon corpus. Personal names as terms of address are few in *Heliand*, but they may have been comparatively more numerous in the *Saxon Genesis*: only the first fragment has a name as a term of address (*thu nu Eua*, 1, corresponding to *þu Eue*, *Genesis B*, 791a), but *Genesis B* has four other instances, always at the very beginning of a speech (for only eight terms of address and twelve speeches in total), and one of them has a very distinctly Old Saxon form (*Eue seo gode*, 612a), which suggests it was already present in the original text. The fact that there are no such terms of address in the other fragments might be another argument supporting the hypothesis that the three texts are not fragments of the same poem (see Stévanovitch, 'Cain, *Genesis B*, and the Old Saxon *Genesis*').

⁶⁴ There are a few exceptions to that strong trend: e.g. *alomatig fadar*, 'almighty father', *Saxon Genesis* (169a); *god hebanriki*, 'god ruler of heaven', *Saxon Genesis* (191, 202 and 229b); *Crist alouualdo*, 'Christ almighty', *Heliand* (3139b).

⁶⁵ See Doane, *The Saxon Genesis*, p. 95; and Cathey, *Heliand*, p. 20.

⁶⁶ See Cathey, *Heliand*, p. 8 and 21, as well as Doane, *The Saxon Genesis*, p. 46.

Direct Speech in Beowulf

Terms of address	In the Latin source	Translated into Old English	Deleted in Old English	Added in Old English	In the Old English poem
<i>Juliana</i>	16	9	7	13	22
<i>Elene</i>	18	15	3	20	35
<i>Andreas</i>	59	36	23	40	76
<i>Genesis A</i>	13	8	5	33	41

Fig 4 Terms of address in Latin and Old English

TERMS OF ADDRESS IN LATIN SOURCES

The distribution of more varied terms of address suggests possible Latin influence, but careful comparison of the poems with their Latin sources indicates that the influence is not direct. First, it must be noted that the terms of address found in Old English translations often have no equivalent in the source, and vice versa (Figure 4).⁶⁷ Even when the Old English term has a counterpart in the source, it rarely is a literal translation. In fact, it seems that the conventions displayed in the sources are rather different from those observed in the Old English poems, even those following the ‘new’ model outlined above.

The Vulgate shows little stylistic use of terms of address: it relies almost exclusively on personal names for human characters and *domine* (‘lord’) for God. Hagiographic texts are richer, though the terms they use are usually simpler than in Old English. One striking feature is the fact that the dominant paradigm for relationships in that corpus is family rather than suzerainty as in Old English.

Words denoting family relationship are used when literally appropriate (Symon calling his son Judas *fili* in the *Inventio sanctae crucis*, for instance) or among fellow Christians. This is particularly true in the *recensio casanatensis*, where Andrew and the Pilot address each other as *frater* (‘brother’), where Andrew repeatedly addresses his disciples as *fratres* (‘brothers’) or *filoli mei* (‘my dear children’, literally ‘my little children’), and is himself once addressed by them as *Pater Andreas* (‘Father Andrew’).⁶⁸ In the *Passio Iulianae* too, Juliana addresses the

⁶⁷ Two points are worth noting regarding the number of terms of address in the Latin sources. First, only comparable passages have been examined: when a whole speech has no equivalent in the corresponding Old English poem, it has not been taken into account. Second, regarding *Juliana*, figures are based on the *Passio Iulianae* edited by Lapidge. The text found in the *Acta Sanctorum* has the same number of terms of address, but with one difference: one *domina mea*, found in § 10 in Lapidge’s text and without equivalent in the Old English poem, is missing whereas one *immunde spiritus*, absent from Lapidge’s text but apparently translated as *hean helle gæst* in Old English (‘abject spirit from hell’, 457a), is found in § 11.

⁶⁸ The use of such words denoting family relationship is already present in the *Praxeis Andreou*.

crowd as *patres mei presbiteri et matres* ('my venerable fathers and mothers', § 20).⁶⁹ It is clear that the metaphoric use of such words was well known in Anglo-Saxon monastic culture. Ælfric, for instance, regularly addresses his audience as *mine gebroðra* ('my brothers') in the *Catholic Homilies*. God is also routinely described or addressed as a father in Old English texts. However, the use of words denoting family among fellow Christians outside the monastic context, which is common in Latin hagiographies, is absent from Old English hagiographic literature, whether in prose or in verse.

The instances mentioned above, found in the *recensio casanatenensis* and *Passio Iulianae*, are all eliminated from the translations: they are either omitted altogether or replaced with phrases unrelated to the notion of family. Thus *patres mei presbiteri et matres* becomes *leof weorud* ('dear crowd', *Juliana*, 647a), while *frater / fratres* is translated (when it is retained) successively as *macraeftige men* ('powerful men', *Andreas*, 257a), *gumena leofost* ('dearest of men', *Andreas*, 575a) and *hyse leofesta* ('dearest young man' or 'dearest warrior', *Andreas*, 595b). Interestingly, such words tend to be omitted or replaced by something else even when they are literally true. Thus, only one of Symon's four *fili* is translated as *min swæs sunu* ('my own son', *Elene*, 447a), while the others are translated by Cynewulf as *guma ginga* ('young man', 464a), *hæleð min se leofa* ('my dear young man', 511b) and *hyse leofesta* (523a). The relatively frequent use of *leofa* in the translations suggests that words denoting family are interpreted primarily as terms of endearment.⁷⁰ The evidence gathered here suggests that Old English poets are not entirely comfortable with the Latin family paradigm and that they are encouraged to innovate as a result.

Another important difference between the two corpora concerns terms of respect or admiration. Such terms are present in apparently traditional poems such as *Genesis A* and *Beowulf*, but they never seem truly at odds with the facts or with the speaker's known opinions. One may argue about whether Hrothgar is performing adequately as a 'protector of warriors' (*wigendra hleo*, *Beowulf*, 428a) when the Danes are attacked by Grendel with impunity,⁷¹ but there is no question that protecting the Danes is part of his role as king and that it is expected of him. Similarly, one might think that calling Sarah *mæg ælfscieno*

⁶⁹ In the *Acta Sanctorum*, the corresponding phrase is *Patres mei & matres* ('my fathers and mothers').

⁷⁰ The same interpretation is perceptible in *Guthlac B*. In the Latin source (Felix's *Vita sancti Guthlaci*), Guthlac addresses his disciple as *fili* and is himself addressed as *pater mi*. Some of those terms of address are omitted or replaced, but several are retained (possibly because the context is clearly monastic). The forms chosen (*Min þæt leofe bearn*, 'my dear child', 1076b; *min þæt swæse bearn*, 'my own child', 1080b and 1166a) are more obviously affectionate than in the source.

⁷¹ On that topic, see Chapter 7, 'Irony as Mockery', pp. 230–3.

(literally 'elf-bright maiden', 1827a and 2731a) is somewhat excessive, but the reactions of the men who see her seem to indicate that she is indeed uncommonly attractive.

In Latin hagiographies, on the other hand, respectful or complimentary terms of address can be highly hypocritical. Elene and Juliana are both addressed as *domina* ('mistress') or *domina mea* ('my mistress') by people who may act deferentially in front of them, but who have no true respect for them or their authority: the word is used by the wise men refusing to answer Elene when at least one of them, Judas, knows the answer she is looking for (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 5), by the demon who is physically constrained to confess his sins but who will rebel again as soon as he is set free (*Passio Iulianae*, § 8 and 12), and by Eleusius who offers Juliana to convert if she will marry him, when he clearly has no intention of fulfilling that promise (*Passio Iulianae*, § 3).

Cynewulf sometimes translates the term literally as *hlæfdige* (Elene, 400b) or *hlæfdige min* (Juliana, 539b; Elene, 655b), but he omits some instances and replaces others with something else. He never uses the word *hlæfdige* when it is not already present in the source. This suggests that the term is not really part of Cynewulf's diction, but that it is too common in the sources to be easily ignored. This might be because female leadership was not a familiar concept, but one may suspect that part of the poet's unease stems from the blatant hypocrisy of the term in that context.

Indeed, other hypocritical terms of address also seem to be somewhat problematic for the poet, though he handles them differently. In *Juliana*, the saint is addressed three times in highly laudatory terms. She is called *Filia mea dulcissima Iuliana, lux oculorum meorum* ('My daughter, sweetest Juliana, light of my eyes', § 2) by her father, *dulcissima mea Iuliana* by Eleusius ('my sweetest Juliana', § 3) and *Iuliane mea* ('My Juliana', § 6)⁷² by the demon disguised as an angel. All three expressions are translated, with even greater emphasis in Old English than in the original text. The first is rendered as a predicative statement (*ðu eart dohtor min seo dyreste / ond seo sweteste in sefan minum, / ange for eorþan, minra eagna leoht, / Iuliana!* 'You are my daughter, the dearest and the sweetest in my heart, alone on earth, the light of my eyes, Juliana', 93–6a) and the other two as rather flowery addresses (*Min se swetesta sunnan scima, / Iuliana!* 'My sweetest sunlight, Juliana', 166–7a, and *seo dyreste / ond seo weorþeste wuldorcynige, / dryhtne ussum*, 'the dearest and the most precious to the king of glory, our lord', 247b–249a).

It is striking that Cynewulf does not use a more conventional term of endearment here, such as *Iuliana leofa* or *leofast mægða*.⁷³ The hyperbole

⁷² The *Acta Sanctorum* have *Iuliana dilecta mea* ('my dear Juliana') here.

⁷³ The exact phrase *leofast mægða* is only found once in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus (*Guthlac B*, 1376b), but the pattern itself is quite common, for instance as *leofast manna*.

is legitimate in the first instance, as Juliana's father is very emphatic in the source as well, but it is less obviously called for in the other two. It might be that Cynewulf felt that the scenes were climactic enough to deserve a more expansive treatment, but it is also quite possible that the poet felt conventional terms of endearment were inappropriate when the speaker was so clearly deceitful. By making the flattery even more shameless, Cynewulf ensures that the villains' attitudes cannot be mistaken with genuine affection.

Confronted with terms of address whose blatant insincerity presumably fits ill with Old English conventions, Cynewulf has used all possible tactics: omission, substitution (*ead mæg* for *domina mea*, *Juliana*, 352a), literal translation (*hlæfdige min*) and amplification (*Min se swetesta sunnan scima*, / *Iuliana!* for *dulcissima mea Iuliana*). As with the family paradigm, it seems that what is going on here is not the direct transfer of Latin conventions into the poet's diction, but rather a process of innovation and experimentation, spurred on by the confrontation with a foreign model. It is likely that the greater variety of terms of address in some Old English poems is due to that kind of indirect influence rather than to straightforward imitation.

TERMS OF ADDRESS IN PRAYERS

Cynewulf's handling of addresses to Elene and Juliana proves that innovation could and did occur within the narrative tradition. The greatest variety in terms of address, however, is found when characters are addressing God, particularly in prayers, which suggests possible influence from Old English prayers.

Old English prayers found outside a narrative context also display numerous and varied terms of address. To some extent, that feature is part of the genre itself. As explained by Bzdyl, all Latin prayers follow more or less the same structure: invocation, comment on the invocation, petition and glorification.⁷⁴ Old English translations of Latin prayers tend to retain that pattern, but they handle invocation rather differently: they can do away with the comment on the invocation and, most importantly, they usually develop the invocation much beyond the opening of the prayer. Bzdyl quotes the example of the translation of the Lord's Prayer found in the Exeter Book, which is indeed a typical example:

...g fæder, þu þe on heofonum eardast,
geweorðad wuldres dreame. Sy þinum weorcum halgad
noma niþpa bearnum; þu eart nergend wera.
Cyme þin rice wide, ond þin rædfæst willa

⁷⁴ Bzdyl, 'Prayer in Old English Narratives', p. 18.

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aræred under rodores *hrofe*, eac þon on *rumre* foldan.
Style us to dæge *domfæstne blæd*,
hlaf userne, *helpend wera*,
þone singalan, *sodfæst meotod*.
Ne læt usic costunga cnyssan to *swiðe*,
ac þu us freedom gief, *folca waldend*,
from yfla *gehwam*, a to *widan feore* [my italics] (*Lord's Prayer I*)⁷⁵

The text is very close to the original, but the translator has added a few words, shown here in italics. The additions include a second-person predicative statement and three terms of address. It seems that the translator is guided by two imperatives. First, the composition of a very close translation requires the use of fillers to alliterate with words such as *noma*, *hlaf* and *freedom*. The 'filling' function is particularly obvious in the second part of the poem, where additions are systematically used to complete the second part of the line. Second, the poet is clearly concerned with making the prayer as pleasing to God as possible: with the possible exception of *domfæstne blæd*, which merely develops the notion of 'daily bread', all the additions contribute to amplifying the glorification of God.

That glorification is not merely descriptive, but also performative, as befits a prayer. As noted by Bzdyl, 'the prayer itself develops a persona, or speaker, in the act of realizing man's true relationship to God'.⁷⁶ In fact, the prayer develops two personae: that of the speaker and that of the addressee. The words of the prayer delineate the contours of those personae and the performance gives life to them. In this way, God and all his attributes are made present in the speaker's consciousness,⁷⁷ and perhaps in actual fact, while the speaker becomes one, at least temporarily, with the ideal Christian they are trying to be. Invocations are particularly apt to facilitate that performance. Predicative structures allow the speaker to enunciate what they believe to be true. Invocations go beyond that; they give shape and substance to a relationship: calling someone 'lord' is, *de facto*,

⁷⁵ 'Holy father, you who dwell in heaven, *honoured with glorious joy*. May your name be hallowed *by your deeds among men's children*. You are *the saviour of men*. May your kingdom come *far and wide* and your *wise* will be established *under the roof of heaven* as well as on the *spacious earth*. Give us today *lasting prosperity*, our daily bread, *everlasting, helper of men, true lord*. Do not let temptation oppress us *too much*, but give us freedom, ruler of *multitudes, from every evil, always and for ever*' [my italics].

⁷⁶ Bzdyl, 'Prayer in Old English Narratives', p. 25.

⁷⁷ For a similar interpretation, see Irving's analysis of one of Andreas's prayers (*Andreas*, 1281–95) in 'A Reading of *Andreas*', pp. 231–2: 'His speech is typical of others in Old English Christian poetry in which the traditional variational style of honorific epithets is used to keep God (usually in his loftiest aspect as *ælmhtig* or *ece eadfruma*) in the field of the speaker's consciousness as transcendent being (seven epithets of this kind appear in this speech), while at the same time the massing of personal pronouns mentioned earlier in this essay is used to express immanence or intimacy between God and man (there are three pronouns in each of 1284, 1285 and 1289).'

placing oneself under their authority. Thus, through the invocation, the addressee becomes a lord and the speaker becomes a follower of that lord. Varied terms of address allow the speaker to give life to a deeper and richer relationship, which goes beyond mere submission to encompass all the facets of religious belief.

It seems quite likely that the need for fillers in translations of Latin prayers into Old English encouraged the use of many invocations and that, after a while, that practice became conventional in all Old English prayers, including within narratives. That, in turn, might have facilitated the development of more varied terms of address more generally, though there is no reason to think that prayers are the ultimate source of all innovations in the use of terms of address in Old English poetry.

SECULAR PERFORMANCE

The performative power of terms of address is particularly obvious in prayers, but it is not restricted to that particular genre. In secular contexts too, terms of address allow the speaker to construct a specific image of themselves, of their addressee and of the relationship between them.

That phenomenon also occurs in real-life conversations, where it has received significant critical attention. Brown and Levinson's work from the perspective of politeness theory is particularly illuminating. They build on Goffman's concept of 'face', which he defines as 'the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself' through the way he behaves in front of others, or as 'an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes'.⁷⁸ Brown and Levinson argue that, in real-life conversation, terms of address do not simply describe a pre-existing relationship, but that they actually perform that relationship. Furthermore, they argue that that performance has an immediate purpose: reassuring the addressee that their face is not being threatened.⁷⁹ Thus, they show that terms of address are typically used precisely when speakers are doing something that could be perceived as a face-threatening act (FTA) by the addressee. Requests are a typical example: because their aim is to make the addressee do something that they do not particularly want to do, they constitute a social threat – they imply that the speaker cares more about their own wishes than about those of their addressee. To soften that threat, one typically uses a politeness strategy.

According to Brown and Levinson,⁸⁰ several strategies are available (as shown in Figure 5), depending on how serious the FTA is:

⁷⁸ Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 182.

⁸⁰ Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 60.

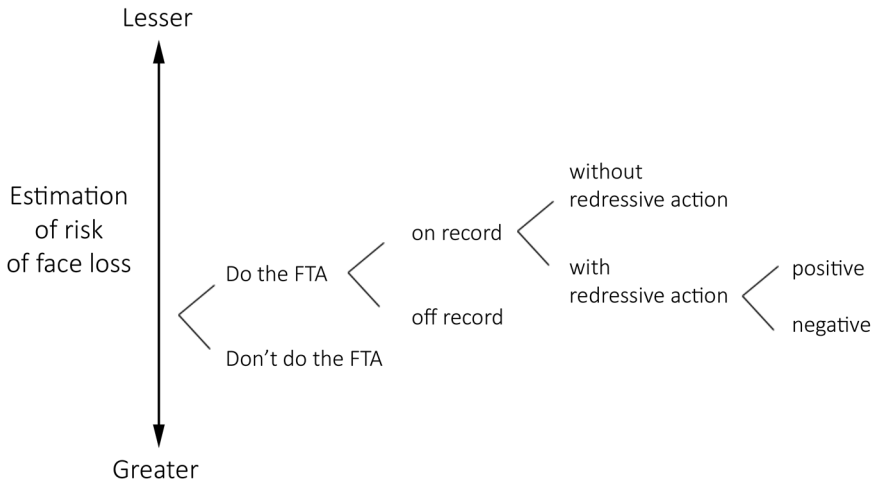


Fig 5 Politeness strategies (from Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 81)

Terms of address constitute one form of redressive action. Terms of endearment constitute positive redressive action in that they allow the speaker to claim sympathy for the addressee and their wishes, whereas terms of respect constitute negative redressive action in that they allow the speaker to make clear that they respect the addressee's prerogatives and have no intention of impinging on them. The seriousness of the FTA depends mostly on three sociological factors: the relative power of the hearer over the speaker, the social distance between them and the ranking of the imposition involved in doing the FTA in a particular culture.⁸¹

There are good reasons to think that Brown and Levinson's findings can shed light on the use of terms of address in Old English narrative poems. Many of the terms of address in our corpus are to be found in the context of directive illocutionary acts, which, by definition, constitute FTAs.⁸² Moreover, terms of address are especially numerous in contexts where the weight of the FTA is expected to be high. Thus, they are most often used when the speaker is addressing someone more powerful or when the FTA ranks high.

This is particularly obvious in *Beowulf*: clusters of terms of address are found when Beowulf requests from Hrothgar the right to guard the very seat of his power (426b–430a, four terms), when Beowulf asks Hrothgar to take his men under his protection (1474–83, four

⁸¹ Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 16. See also p. 74.

⁸² Searle defines directives so: 'The illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts ... by the speaker to get the hearer to do something' (*Expression and Meaning*, p. 13). They include orders, requests, offers and advice.

terms) and when Hrothgar enjoins Beowulf to beware excessive pride (1758–61a, three terms).⁸³ Only in the third situation is the speaker addressing someone lower in the social hierarchy, and the advice given is such that it would be terribly offensive if it came from anyone less respected.

In religious poems, the situation is sometimes less clear-cut, as much interaction occurs outside the 'normal' social sphere, involving either God or demons. Still, generally speaking, the model predicted by politeness theory is respected. The tendency to accumulate numerous terms of address when addressing God is certainly consistent with his infinitely superior status. As for human interactants, they most systematically receive terms of address when they are socially superior to the speaker and the terms of address are most numerous in the context of FTAs. Thus the prefect Eleusius uses no such term when addressing Juliana's father, whereas the latter uses no less than three terms when trying to placate him (*Juliana*, 68b–88). Similarly, Guthlac usually addresses his disciple Beccel affectionately, but he does not use terms of address systematically, even when he is performing a directive speech act (*Guthlac B*, 1175b–1196). On the other hand, Beccel uses terms of address on the three occasions when he talks to his master (1011–22, 1173b–1175a and 1203–23), and the terms are especially numerous when Beccel is asking for information (five terms when he enquires after his health, 1011–22, and six when he asks about the angel, 1203–23).

Occasionally, someone who is not socially superior to the speaker may receive several terms of address when the FTA is not negated by the speaker's higher status. Thus, when Hrothgar orders Wulfgar to let Beowulf and his men come in, the social hierarchy prescribes that Wulfgar has to obey such orders, so no term of address is necessary (*Beowulf*, 372–89a). On the other hand, when Abraham asks his wife to pretend to be his sister, he is asking for rather more than what can legitimately be expected from a dutiful wife and accordingly he uses three terms of address to soften the FTA (*Genesis A*, 1824–44). Conversely, when he tells her that she is free to treat Hagar as she wishes, which is not a FTA, he uses no term of address at all (2258–60). Even though Old English poetic speeches are very unlike spontaneous speeches in many other respects, their use of terms of address thus in large part conforms to what models designed for real-life interaction predict.

One caveat is necessary, however. While there is a definite connection between FTAs and terms of address, there are cases where the terms chosen clearly do more than merely 'soften' the threat. Perhaps the most interesting extant passage in this respect is the scene when

⁸³ See also 1652–76, when Beowulf brings Hrothgar treasures from Grendel's cave (three terms, but more spread out than in the examples above).

Beowulf asks permission from Hrothgar to guard Heorot. The scene has been studied both by Kightley and Shippey from the perspective of politeness theory and both critics find something distinctly 'impolite' about the scene.⁸⁴ Both scholars agree that the FTA ranks very high, but they do not interpret Beowulf's politeness strategy in the same way.

For Shippey, Beowulf avoids getting fully on the record by using the subjunctive tense on several occasions and by explaining that the idea to come to Heorot was not originally his (thus allowing Hrothgar to reject the offer without in turn threatening Beowulf's face). One may also note the use of several terms of respect, which constitutes negative redress.

Kightley rejects that analysis, because he finds it incompatible with 'Beowulf's character as a whole' and because he sees the end of Beowulf's speech – where Beowulf describes the two possible outcomes of the fight with Grendel – as evidence that Hrothgar's acceptance of his request is already settled for Beowulf and that what the hero is implying is that, in essence, Hrothgar has no other choice than letting him fight Grendel. Kightley then concludes that Beowulf's request is actually performed baldly and on record.⁸⁵

That second interpretation is very problematic, not least because it takes what is pragmatically *implied* (the fact that Hrothgar must grant Beowulf's request) as evidence of a threat being performed *on record*. The whole point of implicature is that it allows someone to say something without actually saying it. Beowulf may be (impolitely) suggesting that Hrothgar needs his help, but he is not saying it outright.

Still, Kightley has a point when he claims that Hrothgar is not given much of a choice. Shippey also comments on that ambiguous status of Beowulf's request. For him, politeness is competing with another imperative, crucial to heroic culture: the need to assert oneself strongly. Shippey thus suggests the existence of a conflictive principle, which he opposes to the cooperative principle of Gricean conversational analysis:

Cooperative Principle: 'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'⁸⁶

Conflictive Principle: 'In all verbal exchanges, ensure that one's own worth is stated and acknowledged. If it is acknowledged by hearer, be prepared to acknowledge hearer's worth. If not, respond with an appropriate degree of reciprocal non-acknowledgment.'⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Kightley, 'Reinterpreting Threats to Face'; Shippey, 'Principles of Conversation in Beowulfian Speech', pp. 122–3.

⁸⁵ Kightley, 'Reinterpreting Threats to Face', pp. 515–17.

⁸⁶ Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', p. 45.

⁸⁷ Shippey, 'Principles of Conversations in Beowulfian Speech', p. 121.

While it is true that politeness theory has usually focused on cooperation, the notion that one's face (and not just the addressee's) must be protected at all costs is already at the very heart of the notion of 'face'. What Shippey presents as an additional principle is in fact the other side of the same coin.⁸⁸ Speakers are always primarily concerned with the protection of their own face from threat and it is precisely because of that concern that they usually avoid threatening others' faces, as that would mean incurring retaliation. Politeness certainly does not require turning the other cheek. On the contrary, rule breaking (which inevitably occurs) must be sanctioned ('with an appropriate degree of reciprocal non-acknowledgment'); otherwise the social institution of politeness (which protects everyone's face) would disappear.

The whole point of politeness is that it allows one to threaten someone's face very seriously without anyone actually losing face. It is inherently a balance between aggression and the preservation of goodwill. Rhetoric, the art of persuasion, is similarly all about imposing one's views on others (a very threatening act), while preserving the illusion of consensus.

In that sense, Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar is very rhetorical. The strategies employed are optimally calculated to ensure compliance while preserving face. Shippey rightly notes the very powerful use of a maxim at the end of his speech.⁸⁹ One cannot easily reject a proverb or argue with it, because it is meant to embody a truth recognised by all ('people-truth'). The only available option for the addressee is to reject the proverb's applicability to the present situation, but that too is difficult because more often than not that applicability has only been implied, not stated, and it is always harder to argue against something that has not been explicitly stated. Proverbs are thus very useful to prevent or to close an argument. As noted by Shippey, the use of a proverb can be both a way of claiming common ground with the addressee (positive politeness) and a clever tactic to exploit that common ground to one's advantage.

The terms of address used by Beowulf in that same speech may be interpreted in a very similar, dual way. When Beowulf formulates the request itself, he uses the following terms of respect: *brego Beorhtdena* (427a, 'lord of the glorious Danes'), *eodor Scyldinga* (428a, 'prince' or 'protector of the Scyldings'), *wigendra hleo* (429b, 'protector of warriors') and *freowine folca* (430a, 'noble friend of the people'). They can all

⁸⁸ Shippey admits himself in his conclusion that what he initially presents as a new, distinct principle to better explain some important scenes in *Beowulf* may in fact be better understood as one facet of broader 'linguistic universals' in conversation. His aim seems to be to point out the duality inherent in politeness strategies rather than to contradict the theory itself.

⁸⁹ Shippey, 'Principles of Conversation in Beowulfian Speech', p. 123.

be considered negative redressive action: Beowulf is acknowledging that protecting the Danes is Hrothgar's prerogative and that he has no intention of challenging that position, in spite of what his offer of guarding Heorot alone might suggest. At the same time, though, those terms of respect also work as reminders of Hrothgar's obligations as a leader. They imply that if Hrothgar truly is a protector of his people, then he must take all necessary steps to ensure their protection and, it is suggested, that includes granting Beowulf's request. Like proverbs, such terms of address are powerful because they embody socially accepted truths.

This is a very important aspect of social performance. Typically, as stated above, a term of address performs a relationship and does not merely describe it. At the same time, however, that performance can only be felicitous if it follows accepted social norms. In other words, calling Hrothgar a protector puts him in a position where he has to act as a competent protector, but it only works that way because Beowulf, Hrothgar and the people around them believe that 'protector' is an adequate description of Hrothgar's status.

If Hrothgar felt that the term of address was inappropriate, then it would have no binding power over him. Similarly, if Beowulf felt that the term was inappropriate, then his performance would be pointless. It is only because all the people present, including Hrothgar himself, acknowledge the term as accurate, that Hrothgar is compelled to act in a manner fitting with it. In the same performance, Hrothgar is thus compelled to act in a certain way, but also is reinstated in a position of trust and power.

The audience has a part to play in that performance. Within the poem, Beowulf's speech is public, so that the Danes and the Geats can both witness that Beowulf acknowledges Hrothgar's status as a protector of his people and judge how worthy of that status Hrothgar proves in his answer. Outside the poem, the audience is also in a position to witness and judge. As the poem is ostensibly the story of famous heroes who lived a long time ago, the audience is supposed to be the posterity of those heroes – they need to act as witnesses so that the heroes' fame does not die away. Additionally, as the audience is familiar with the formulaic epithets used for kings and what they entail, they are in a position to judge whether Hrothgar acts fittingly, in comparison with other kings whose stories they may have heard before. The use of specific terms of address thus raises some expectations for the audience and invites them to take an active role in interpreting the action under way. The device is thus both dramatic and didactic.

Few Old English poetic speeches display such a powerful performance. However, Beowulf's speech is not an isolated case. Whenever a speaker uses a term of address denoting a relationship that is clearly

identifiable and that goes with a number of recognised obligations, the performance has that dual power: reaffirming the status of the addressee *and* the obligations that go with that status. In other words, terms of address do not merely soften FTAs: when they are well chosen, they protect the addressee's face while making the speaker's claim (which is also a threat) stronger.

The move from traditional terms of address denoting affection, kinship or social status to more varied terms is a move away from that model. When Juliana is addressed as the sweetest radiance of the sun (*Juliana*, 166), the performance does not place her in a recognisable social position with its attending duties. At best, a loving relationship is performed, but it does not have much power when none of the interactants believe in it, and, even if it were felicitous, the duties attached to that relationship would not be very clear – certainly not as clear as the duties of a 'protector of the people' for instance.

In this case, the term of address is more ornamental than truly rhetorical. That does not necessarily make it less informational, however. It certainly contributes to the impression that the speaker is rather shallow and untrustworthy. The terms of address used by the likes of Beowulf cannot comment on the speaker in this way, because they are too formulaic and conventional. They are the performance of a collectively sanctioned truth, not an individual statement. With the development of more varied terms of address, one sees what could be the beginning of a shift from powerful rhetorical performance towards a somewhat less dramatic but also more nuanced representation of interpersonal relationships.

It is fair to say that interpersonal relationships are essential to Direct Speech in Old English poetry. However, those relationships are not usually represented in the subjective, individualised manner that a modern reader tends to expect. The stylistic devices favoured by Old English poets allow them to cast their characters in sharply defined roles. What matters is not what makes a given character different from all others, but rather what makes them fit into a recognisable paradigm. The palette of possible characterisations is thus considerably narrower than in modern fiction, but that is clearly deliberate. It makes it possible for the audience to know all the archetypal roles very well and thus to be in a position to judge whether a given character is a particularly fine embodiment of the archetype or not.

Yet characterisation (i.e. the description of who the characters are) is probably not the primary function of the stylistic devices focused on persons. For one thing, characters' identities are much too fluid. From one scene to the next, the same character may take on another role. The words chosen are always appropriate to the immediate context, but they do not necessarily help to construct any kind of stable persona

throughout the poem. Furthermore, the focus is rarely on the character as an independent unit and much more often is on the character in their relationship with others at a given moment.

What the poet is creating is not a gallery of individual portraits, but a choreography, where every character's position is significant not so much in itself as in its connection to others and to the whole, dynamic design. Each 'characterisation' (for want of a better word) is a performance that directly contributes to the drama at hand. At key moments in the narrative, characters dramatically claim existence, align themselves with or against others, and even put their addressee into a new position, thus making the situation at hand stand out with utmost clarity and intensity.⁹⁰

Pragmatic Markers

Pragmatic markers (also known as discourse markers or discourse particles) are key markers of (inter)subjectivity. They are typically a feature of oral discourse; they are high-frequency markers, typically short and unstressed, which may appear in initial or parenthetical position. They do not contribute to the syntactic structure or the semantic content of the proposition. Yet they are essential to communication. Rather like body position, facial expression and gestures, they can be used to take or hold the floor, to mark a boundary in the utterance or to signal the speaker's attitude (towards the addressee or towards what is being said).⁹¹ Again like gestures, they can be difficult to analyse or subclassify because the same marker typically has several functions, often at the same time.

Many pragmatic markers are monosyllabic words (Present-Day English 'well', 'like', 'so', 'yeah'), but they can take the form of a short proposition (Present-Day English 'you know' and 'I mean'). As the examples given demonstrate, pragmatic markers typically develop out of existing markers. They do so through a process of grammaticalisation (i.e. a lexical marker acquires a grammatical meaning or a grammatical marker develops a new grammatical function)⁹² and (inter)subjectification (i.e. a marker comes to encode the

⁹⁰ Even though his approach is quite different, Mize reaches similar conclusions in *Traditional Subjectivities*, noting for instance that the sailors of *The Whale* are only important in the poem as 'performers of an imprudent action' (p. 17) and not as characters in their own right, or that in *Genesis A*, there is 'a sadness that is Sarai as much as a Sarai who is sad' (p. 59), before concluding that the translator's interest is 'in situating ethical agents within interactional, relational structures' (p. 70).

⁹¹ See Brinton, 'The Development of Discourse Markers in English', especially pp. 46–7 and *Pragmatic Markers in English*, especially pp. 29–40, and Fernandez, *Les particules énonciatives dans la construction du discours*, especially pp. 4–5.

⁹² See in particular Hopper and Traugott, *Grammaticalization*.

speaker's attitude towards what is being discussed and towards the addressee).⁹³

While pragmatic markers are most typical of spontaneous oral speech, they can also be found in written texts, particularly in transitional texts such as Old English poetry. So far, two emblematic markers of Old English narratives have attracted the most attention: *hwæt* and *þa*. *Hwæt*, when used at the beginning of a new story or episode, has been shown by Brinton to behave very similarly to the Present-Day marker 'you know'.⁹⁴ As for *þa*, its role in structuring information has been extensively studied by Enkvist and Wärvik.⁹⁵

Direct Speech has its own typical markers. Most characteristic is the marker *nu*, which is extremely common in Direct Speech, with 222 occurrences in our corpus: in fact, it is the twelfth most frequently used word in Direct Speech.⁹⁶ While much less frequent, several adverbial clauses (*gif ic mot*, *gif þu dyrr*, *swa þu me beoðest*) are also worth mentioning.

Nu

Originally, *nu* is an adverb with a temporal meaning; it denotes coincidence with the moment of utterance. Over time, the adverb has developed new meanings to become a very rich pragmatic marker. In Present-Day English, 'now' is commonly used as a boundary marker, to signal a new topic or a new stage in the conversation. It can also act as a subjective intensifier, marking the speaker's strong involvement in what is being said, or as a modality marker, conveying the speaker's attitude towards what is being said.⁹⁷

Present-day English 'now' has come so far in its transformation into a pragmatic marker that it can easily be used with verbs in the past tense. Such is not the case for Old English *nu*, which is almost always found with verbs in the present tense.⁹⁸ The persistence of that correlation suggests that Old English *nu* still retains at least some of its temporal meaning. However, the transformation into a pragmatic marker has already begun, as can easily be shown, both from the marker's formal characteristics and from the contexts in which it is encountered.

⁹³ See in particular Traugott, '(Inter)subjectivity and (inter)subjectification'.

⁹⁴ See Brinton, 'The Development of Discourse Markers in English' and *Pragmatic Markers in English*, pp. 181–210.

⁹⁵ Enkvist and Wärvik, 'Old English *þa*, Temporal Claims, and Narrative Structure'; Enkvist, 'Problems Raised by Old English *þa*'; Wärvik, 'Participants Tracking Narrative Structure' and 'Connective or "Disconnective" Discourse Marker?'. See also Kim, *The Particle 'þa' in the West-Saxon Gospels*.

⁹⁶ *Nu* and *swa* are both in twelfth position, after *ic*, *ond*, *þæt*, *on*, *þe*, *þu*, *ne*, *to*, *þa*, *he* and *me*.

⁹⁷ See Aijmer, *English Discourse Particles*, pp. 57–96.

⁹⁸ One exception is *Beowulf*, 2247b, *nu hæleð ne moston*, which might be best translated as 'since the heroes have proved unable to do so', with a perfect rather than with a preterit.

FORMAL FEATURES OF *Nu*

Based on a study of 100 occurrences of 'now' in a Present-Day English corpus, Hirshberg and Litman have established the following criteria to differentiate pragmatic (discourse) uses of 'now' from temporal (sentential) uses:

- (i) Discourse *now* constituted most often a phrase on its own (41.3% of the cases). Sentence *now* hardly ever constituted a phrase by itself.
- (ii) Discourse *now* appeared most often at the beginning of a phrase (98.4%). Sentential *now* appeared most often in non-initial position (86.5%).
- (iii) Discourse *now* was more often deaccentuated than sentential *now*.
- (iv) Discourse *now* cooccurred with other cue-words, e.g. *well now ...*⁹⁹

Hirschberg and Litman's analysis is very dependent on intonational data.¹⁰⁰ Such data is not directly available for Old English poetry, but the verse – which corresponds, roughly speaking, to one idea, one syntactic unit and one intonational unit – is a close enough equivalent to the intonational phrase that one may attempt to apply Hirschberg and Litman's criteria to the Old English poetic corpus.

Criterion (i) is not applicable as a word can never constitute a whole verse in Old English poetry. Criteria (ii) and (iii) are applicable, though, and they suggest that most uses of *nu* are pragmatic: in our corpus, *nu* is typically the very first word of the verse (113 out of 222 occurrences), sometimes the second (54 occurrences). Furthermore, only 33 of the 222 occurrences are stressed (the second stress of the verse in almost all cases).

Admittedly, the evidence is somewhat skewed by Old English metrical rules. Hirschberg and Litman's criteria (ii) and (iii) suggest that temporal 'now' will be in non-initial position, but can be unstressed. In Old English poetry, according to Kuhn's Law, if an adverb is unstressed it has to be in the first unstressed section of the verse and is thus very likely to be in initial or near-initial position.¹⁰¹ As such, it is not impossible that some of the initial unstressed markers are actually temporal markers 'forced' into that position by Kuhn's Law, rather than genuine pragmatic markers.

As for criterion (iv), strictly speaking *nu* never co-occurs with another pragmatic marker in the corpus examined. There are instances

⁹⁹ Hirschberg and Litman, 'Empirical Studies on Disambiguation of Cue Phrases', quoted from Horne *et al.*, 'Discourse Markers and the Segmentation of Spontaneous Speech', p. 126.

¹⁰⁰ See also Hirschberg and Litman's earlier paper, 'Now Let's Talk About *Now*'.

¹⁰¹ Kuhn, 'Zur Wortstellung und -betonung im Altgermanischen', p. 8.

of *nu* co-occurring with *giet* or *gena* ('yet', 'still'),¹⁰² and even with *þa*,¹⁰³ which is a well-attested pragmatic marker elsewhere, but in those cases the compound adverb is in non-initial position and one of the two words is often stressed, while the meaning usually seems to be at least partly temporal.

On the other hand, *nu* occurs relatively often as part of a string of unstressed syllables in initial position, notably in type A verses without a first stressed syllable (Bliss's light verse type A and Sievers's type A3), as in the following examples (syllables with a primary stress marked in italics):

Nu ðu miht gehyran, *hyse leofesta* (*Andreas*, 811)¹⁰⁴

Nu ic þe *halsige*, *heofenrices weard* (*Christ and Satan*, 420)¹⁰⁵

Gewit þu nu *feran* and þine *fare lædan* (*Genesis A*, 1746)¹⁰⁶

Taken together, the evidence suggests that Old English *nu* has probably already started functioning as a pragmatic marker in a number of instances, but that the transformation has not yet gone as far as in Present-Day English (this is suggested, in particular, by the absence of a conventional collocation with another pragmatic marker).

According to Defour, who has studied the evolution of *nu* / 'now' over time in prose, the marker increasingly marks subjectivity but some subjective and intersubjective uses are already discernible in the earliest periods.¹⁰⁷ In the corpus examined here, several of the pragmatic uses attested for Present-Day English are already discernible to some extent.

¹⁰² *Nu gena*: *Andreas* (422b and 475b) and *Guthlac A* (155a); see also *Solomon and Saturn* (263b). *Nu gyt* / *giet*: *Andreas* (814b), *Beowulf* (956b, 1058b and 1134b), *Genesis A* (1038a); see also *Descent into Hell* (73b), *Psalm 138* (58b), *Psalm 140* (23a), *Seasons for Fasting* (97b), *Boethius Meter 17* (5a) and *Boethius Meter 24* (46a). In *Psalm 91* (40), the compound does occur in initial unstressed position but the meaning seems primarily temporal.

¹⁰³ *Beowulf* (426b and 657b), *Andreas* (489b), *Genesis B* (792a and 831b), *Christ and Satan* (180b), *Juliana* (511b and 520b), *Elene* (539b and 661b). See also *Christ I* (335a), *Christ III* (1454a), *Guthlac B* (1231b), *Judith* (86b), *Azarias* (42a), *Resignation* (64b), *Descent into Hell* (129a), *Psalm 60* (5b), *Psalm 62* (18a), *Psalm 72* (3a), *Psalm 78* (14b), *Psalm 106* (4a), *Psalm 113* (32b), *Psalm 114* (25b), *Psalm 117* (4b), *Psalm 118* (80b and 463b), *Psalm 122* (11a), *Psalm 123* (2b), *Psalm 129* (2b), *Psalm 149* (2b), *Boethius Meter 4* (57b), *Boethius Meter 8* (7b), *Judgement Day II* (33b), and *Lord's Prayer III* (4a and 31b). One exception is *Seasons for Fasting* (202a), where the compound occurs in unstressed initial position and does not have an obvious temporal meaning.

¹⁰⁴ 'Now you can hear, dearest young man'.

¹⁰⁵ 'Now I beg you, guardian of the kingdom of heaven'.

¹⁰⁶ 'Go now and lead your family'.

¹⁰⁷ Defour, "'And so now ...'" The Grammaticalisation and (Inter)subjectification of Now', p. 35. See also her Ph.D dissertation, 'A Diachronic Study of the Pragmatic Markers *Well* and *Now*'.

NU AS A BOUNDARY MARKER

The temporal marker *nu* / 'now' allows the speaker to locate an event or action with reference to the moment of utterance. The Present-Day boundary marker extends that function to locate not an outside process, but the process of utterance itself: 'Now I am saying this.' For Quirk *et al.*, 'the succession in time ... conveyed by the adverbial is converted into the logical succession of discourse'.¹⁰⁸ In a sense, 'now' is redundant because it expresses the idea that the utterance coincides with the moment of utterance, which is tautological. The effect, however, is to 'reboot' the utterance, to make a fresh start. This is particularly useful when the conversation has been trailing off or going off track. By using 'now', the speaker sets the counter back to zero and reclaims control of the progression of the conversation. This explains why 'now' is very often used by speakers in positions of authority, for instance a teacher or someone conducting a job interview.¹⁰⁹ This also explains why the boundary marker can be used with the past tense: it does not locate the past event discussed but the discussion itself.

In Old English, that shift from locating the event discussed to locating the discussion itself has clearly started, but the process is not completed yet. One of the most interesting cases occurs not in Direct Speech but in the narrative of *Christ and Satan*. In section XI, the poet explains how Christ ascended to heaven and how 'now' he sits on the right of God. At the beginning of section XII, the poet uses the adverb once again, but this time the temporal reference is less obvious:

Hafað nu geþingod to us þeoden mæra,
æلميhtig god,
on domdæge drihten seolfa. (*Christ and Satan*, 597–9)¹¹⁰

The decision itself is already taken, so it must have occurred in the past, while Doomsday has yet to come, at least in real life: in the poem this passage precisely acts as a transition towards the description of the Last Judgement. As such, it seems unlikely that *nu* has a temporal value here. The fact that it occurs at the very beginning of a new section rather suggests it is used primarily as a boundary marker.

There are many other instances where *nu* occurs thus at the beginning of a new stage in a poem: at the beginning of a new section,¹¹¹ at

¹⁰⁸ Quirk *et al.*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, p. 640, quoted in Aijmer, *English Discourse Particles*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ On the favoured contexts for 'now', see Aijmer, *English Discourse Particles*, p. 69.

¹¹⁰ 'Almighty God, the illustrious prince, has now determined [to come] to us on Doomsday, the lord himself.'

¹¹¹ In addition to *Christ and Satan* (597), quoted above, see also the very beginning of *Christ II* (440), *The Whale*, *Homiletic Fragment II*, *The Husband's Message*, *An Exhortation to Christian Living* and, of course, *Cædmon's Hymn*, as well as *Andreas* (950), *Christ III* (1327) and

the beginning of a new ‘paragraph’ marked by a small capital in the manuscript,¹¹² or at the beginning of a new speech.¹¹³ However, whenever that occurs, *nu* retains some of its literal, temporal meaning. *Nu* is thus typically used when, after discussing past events, the speaker wants to take the conversation back to the present moment.

Quite interestingly, there is often an intersubjective dimension to those passages. Very often, the speaker uses *nu* as a transition from what the speaker has explained to what the addressee needs to do or understand in light of what has been told. For instance, when Wiglaf has finished recounting Beowulf’s last moments, he enjoins his audience to search the barrow, with these words:

Uton nu efstan oðre siðe,
seon ond secean searogimma geþræc,
wundur under wealle (*Beowulf*, 3101–3b)¹¹⁴

Similarly, when Judas’s father has finished narrating Paul’s conversion, he turns back to Judas and to what Judas needs to understand about Christianity with these words:

Nu ðu meaht gehyran, hæleð min se leofa,
hu arfæst is ealles wealdend (*Elene*, 511–12)¹¹⁵

This second example is particularly interesting because very similar phrases occur elsewhere,¹¹⁶ which suggests it is conventional, and

Guthlac A (93). Understandably, *nu*, which is typical of discourse, is much less frequently encountered in that kind of position than *þa*, which is the most common boundary marker within a narrative. See Chapter 1, ‘After the Speech’ (pp. 52–5).

¹¹² See for instance *Beowulf* (3101), *Genesis B* (760 and 816), *Christ I* (119 and 326), *Christ II* (512, 561 and 850), *Christ III* (1396), *Guthlac A* (6 and 719), *Azarias* (153 and 174), *The Riming Poem* (43), *Elene* (426, 511, 1086, 1120 and 1122), *Dream of the Rood* (78 and 95), *Fates of the Apostles* (88), *Andreas* (185, 340, 391, 595, 644, 648, 729, 810, 897, 936, 1024, 1165, 1179, 1197, 1293, 1320, 1328, 1364, 1425, 1516 and 1558). The notion of ‘paragraph’ needs to be taken with a pinch of salt here: the use of punctuation and capitalisation varies greatly from one manuscript to another and even from one poem to another. However, in most cases, the use of a point followed by a small capital seems to correspond to a new unit, whether syntactical or logical, so the presence of a capital is an interesting clue, even if it cannot be taken as a reliable guide. It must be noted that, generally speaking, capitals are very frequent in the Vercelli Book and quite rare in the Nowell Codex, hence the disparity in the number of instances noted above.

¹¹³ See for instance *Genesis A* (196, 1512 and 1746), *Genesis B* (611 and 725b), *Christ and Satan* (228, 626 and 683), *Andreas* (397, 644, 897, 1023b, 1197, 1281, 1558 and 1602), *Elene* (406b, 807 and 1120), *Christ I* (134b, 149b and 230), *Guthlac A* (6), *Juliana* (272, 461 and 619), *Beowulf* (1818, 2729, 2900 and 3114b), *Battle of Maldon* (93) and *Judgement Day II* (26).

¹¹⁴ ‘We ought to hasten now a second time to see and search the pile of precious stones, the wonder inside the cave’. See also *Beowulf* (1782), when Hrothgar enjoins Beowulf to go to his seat after his sermon, or *Guthlac A* (255), when the saint tells the demon that now they should go (once he has explained why he will stay).

¹¹⁵ ‘Now you can hear, my dear young man, how kind the ruler of all is’.

¹¹⁶ *Andreas* (340, 595, 811, 1517 and 1558), *Elene* (531), *Genesis A* (916), *Juliana* (341). See also *Dream of the Rood* (78).

because the verb *gehyran* ('to hear') makes it clear that the present moment referred to is not a general, neutral present moment but specifically the moment after the speaker has said something.

Sometimes the situation is reversed and, after a first speaker has said something, it is the addressee who uses a similar phrase to show their understanding:

'Nu ic þæt gehyre þurh þinne hleoþorcwide,
þæt ic nyde sceal nipa gebæded
mod meldian, swa þu me beoðest,
þreaned þolian. (*Juliana*, 461–4a)¹¹⁷

Such examples are halfway between a simple temporal marker and a true intersubjective boundary marker. On the one hand, the number of very similar instances suggests that uses of *nu* to refer to the moment of utterance as such, and to signal a new step in the conversation, are becoming conventionalised. On the other hand, *nu* can still be interpreted literally, and there is a clear continuity with instances where *nu* refers to the situation more widely and not to the verbal interaction as such, as in this passage, where the crowd expresses their new understanding after witnessing a miracle:

'Nu we seolfe geseoð sigores tacen,
soðwundor godes, þeah we wiðsocun ær
mid leasingum. (*Elene*, 1120–2a)¹¹⁸

The association of *nu* and a verb of perception is very similar to the instances quoted above and yet here the perception is visual and thus not oriented towards speech (though it may be oriented towards other forms of communication), while the opposition between *nu* and *ær* makes it clear that in this case *nu* has a strong temporal value.

NU AS AN INTERSUBJECTIVE INTENSIFIER

Temporal *nu* / 'now' is a proximal deictic word, i.e. it signals (temporal) closeness with the situation of utterance. This closeness allows it to express relevance and significance: by definition, what occurs 'now' is related to the situation of utterance and thus potentially a matter of concern for the people involved. Additionally, the actualising properties of the temporal marker are apt to give more 'reality' to what is

¹¹⁷ 'Now I hear through your speech that I shall have to speak my mind, compelled by hostile acts, as you have ordered me, and to endure misery.'

¹¹⁸ 'Now we see ourselves the sign of victory, a true miracle of God, although earlier we denied it with lies.'

said, to make it present to the addressee. Those properties explain why 'now' is apt to become a marker of 'affective intensity'.¹¹⁹

In the corpus examined, such 'affective intensity' is discernible on numerous occasions when the speaker is making known what they want: either what they want their addressee to do or what they intend to accomplish themselves (usually for the benefit of the addressee). In those instances, *nu* is clearly intersubjective rather than subjective, i.e. it concerns the speaker's interaction with the addressee rather than the speaker's evaluation of the situation.

According to Kryk-Kastovsky, this pragmatic use of *nu* / 'now' is very ancient and likely already present in Indo-European, at least for questions and requests.¹²⁰ In Old English poetry, the association of *nu* with orders, requests and promises is clearly conventionalised. The most common expression of orders takes the form of an imperative followed by *nu*. The verb and the pragmatic marker combine to form the first half of a verse of type A (my italics):

Tymað *nu* and tiedrað, tires brucað (*Genesis A*, 1512)¹²¹

Loca *nu* ful wide ofer londbuende. (*Christ and Satan*, 683)¹²²

Læt *nu* of þinum staþole streamas weallan,
ea inflede, *nu* ðe ælmihtig
hateð, heofona cyning (*Andreas*, 1503–5a)¹²³

Very similar constructions occur in Old Norse poetry, which tends to confirm the hypothesis that the function is not new (my italics):

'Ristu *nú*, Skírnir, oc gacc at beiða (*For Scírnis*, § 1, 1–2)¹²⁴

'Sittu *nú*, Sigurðr, enn ec mun sofa ganga (*Fáfnismál*, § 27, 1–2)¹²⁵

Ráð þú mér *nú*, Frigg, allz mic fara tíðir (*Vafðrúðnismál*, § 1, 1–2)¹²⁶

The use of a personal name to complete the verse is much less common in Old English than in Old Norse, but there are instances in the Old

¹¹⁹ The expression 'affective intensity' is used by Ochs to describe the properties of 'now' in 'Linguistic Resources for Socializing Humanity'. For Ochs, the explanation is sociocultural: the temporal dimension of the present moment is associated to affect for English speakers (p. 419).

¹²⁰ Kryk-Kastovsky, 'From Temporal Adverbs to Discourse Particles', p. 324. Her work is based on an analysis of Germanic and Slav corpora.

¹²¹ 'Grow now and multiply, enjoy glory'.

¹²² 'Look now very widely at the inhabitants of the land'.

¹²³ 'Let now streams well from your foundation, a swollen river, now that the almighty is giving the order, the king of heaven'. For further examples, see for instance *Beowulf* (589a, 658a, 1474a, 1782a, 2666b and 3101a), *Andreas* (332a and 1281a) and *Elene* (313a, 783a and 792b).

¹²⁴ 'Rise now, Skírnir, and go ask'.

¹²⁵ 'Sit now, Sigurd, and I will go to sleep'.

¹²⁶ 'Advise me now, Frigg, for I wish to go on a journey'.

English corpus where a generic term of address is used in the same position,¹²⁷ so the two traditions clearly still share very similar patterns. This favoured collocation also tends to confirm the connection between *nu* and intersubjectivity.

In this pattern, *nu* is unstressed, as expected from a pragmatic marker, but it is not in initial position (though when the verse is light, as in *Andreas*, 1503, it does occur before the first stress). However, this should rather encourage us to rethink the importance of initial position for Old English pragmatic markers than to doubt *nu*'s pragmatic status here. The pattern identified is much too conventional for *nu* to be strictly lexical. In this respect, the quotation from *Genesis A* provided above is especially telling: it translates the Latin phrase *crescite et multiplicamini* ('grow and multiply'), which would very likely have been quite familiar to the translator, and *nu* is used even though there is no equivalent in the source and no metrical imperative for its presence and whereas the translation is otherwise very close to the source.¹²⁸ What is more, the Latin phrase is translated twice (196 as well as 1512, quoted above) and *nu* is used in both translations. It seems unlikely that the poet would have made that choice if the connection between *nu* and imperatives was not very strong.¹²⁹

At the same time, Hasselgård, who writes on English 'now' and Norwegian 'nå', rightly notes that in this type of use, '[t]he temporal meaning of *now* is not completely absent. Obviously the requested action is meant to take place immediately.'¹³⁰ This persistence of temporal meaning is particularly obvious in the extract from *Andreas* quoted above, where *nu* is used twice. The first instance is clearly pragmatic, but the second one, which specifies what makes the fulfillment of the order particularly relevant at that specific moment (*nu ðe ælmihtig hateð*, 'now the almighty is giving the order'), reactivates the temporal meaning. In this case, the specified circumstance refers to the speech interaction itself and thus reinforces the intersubjective dimension, but it is not always so:

Uton oðwendan hit *nu* monna bearnum,
þæt heofonrice, *nu* we hit habban ne moton [my italics] (*Genesis B*,
403b–404a)¹³¹

¹²⁷ See *Beowulf* (2247a), *Andreas* (1281a), *Elene* (783a and 792b), *Christ and Satan* (626a) and *Guthlac A* (255).

¹²⁸ According to Remley, the Latin verse was very frequently quoted in Old English liturgy and also in charms (*Old English Biblical Verse*, p. 133). For *Genesis A*'s closeness to its source, see Chapter 1, n. 14.

¹²⁹ The connection persists in Present-Day English to some extent, but it is much less distinctive now that 'now' is mostly used in initial position in that case as well.

¹³⁰ Hasselgård, 'Not Now – On Correspondence Between Cognate Adverbs *Now* and *Nå*', p. 104.

¹³¹ 'Let us now divert it from the children of men, that kingdom of heaven, now that we cannot have it'.

Gepenc *nu*, se mæra maga Healfdenes,
 snotttra fengel, *nu* ic eom siðes fus,
 goldwine gumena, hwæt wit geo spræcon [my italics] (*Beowulf*,
 1474–6)¹³²

The fact that the temporal meaning of *nu* can thus be reactivated suggests that temporal reference is still relevant in the pattern combining *nu* with imperatives. At the same time, the fact that it has to be reactivated through a second occurrence suggests that the lexical meaning of the first occurrence is already partly bleached.

Another remarkable pattern combines *nu* with the expression of intent. It may be used to formulate requests or promises. Typically the pattern includes a *verbum dicendi* in the first person (sometimes with the modal *willan*), the marker *nu* and at least one term of address:

Nu ic þe, bearn godes, biddan wille,
 weoroda willgifa, *nu* ic wat þæt ðu eart ... [my italics] (*Elene*, 813–14)¹³³

Nu ic, Beowulf, þec,
 secg betsta, me for sunu wyllle [my italics] (*Beowulf*, 946b–947)¹³⁴

Ic þe wære *nu*,
 mago Ebrea, mine selle [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2204b–2205)¹³⁵

As shown by the third example, the pattern allows *nu* to be placed in unstressed or stressed position, which indicates that the marker still retains some of its original lexical meaning. As with the pattern commented above, that meaning can be reactivated through a second occurrence of *nu*. The strong pattern of collocation with markers of modality and terms of address, on the other hand, suggests that in this case as well *nu* is already a marker of (inter)subjectivity to some extent.

The use of *nu* as an intensifier with various types of declarations of intent, which may or may not be to the addressee's benefit, but which all constitute FTAs, raises once again the issue of politeness. For Brown and Levinson, *now* can act as a marker of politeness in

¹³² 'Think now, illustrious kinsman of Healfdene, wise prince, now that I am ready for this journey, gold-giving friend of men, about what we discussed earlier'. For comparable examples, see *Beowulf* (426b–430, 2247–8a, 2743b–2747) and *Elene* (531b–535 and 813–14) (the circumstances specified in *Elene* are more directed towards the interaction itself, however, not unlike the example in *Andreas*).

¹³³ 'Now I want, Son of God, to ask, provider of desirable things, now that I know that you are ...' For similar requests, see *Genesis A* (2816b–2817), *Beowulf* (426b–430), *Juliana* (272–3), *Christ and Satan* (420), *Fates of the Apostles* (88–91a), *Dream of the Rood* (95–6), *A Prayer* (67–8) and *Descent into Hell* (107).

¹³⁴ 'Now I want you, Beowulf, best of men, for a son'.

¹³⁵ 'I give you now, son of the Hebrews, my pledge'. For other expressions of intent, see *Genesis A* (2286b–2288, 2358–9, 2412b–2413), *Genesis B* (760b–761), *Andreas* (474b–476 and 648–9a), *Guthlac A* (587–9 and 719–21), *Beowulf* (1818–20a, 2508b–2509, 2729–30a), *Husband's Message* (1).

that it marks relevance.¹³⁶ Their claim probably concerns the boundary marker rather than the intensifier but it is valid nonetheless. The use of *nu* in prayers, particularly, suggests it may be used to mark a kind of urgency compatible with the utmost deference: in a sense, the speaker implies that they only dare request so much because their need is so great.

As with terms of address, however, that sword is double-edged: in some cases the urgency rather seems to the detriment of the addressee's own wishes. It is particularly obvious in *Guthlac A*, where the demons are threatening the saint outright, without any deference:

We þe *nu* willað womma gehwylces
lean forgielðan, þær þe lapaſt bið
in ðam grimmeſtan gæſtgewinne. [my italics] (*Guthlac A*, 587–9)¹³⁷

In itself, *nu* is neither rude nor polite. However, as a marker of affective intensity, it tends to cast the interaction into sharper relief, making bold speakers sound bolder and humble ones sound humbler in the way they speak to the addressee. In a poetic context, that property is particularly useful. It serves the dramatisation of the scene and thus helps the poet to highlight key moments of interaction between characters.

NU AS A SUBJECTIVE INTENSIFIER

Nu's affective intensity is not always directed to the addressee in the corpus examined. In some cases, it is used to serve the expression of emotion, and more specifically of one emotion – sadness. This use of *nu* is particularly striking in *Genesis B*, where the marker is repeated nine times in a twenty-nine line speech (792–820), when Adam laments the Fall. This feature is already present in the corresponding Old Saxon passage and, as noted by Stévanovitch,¹³⁸ it finds an echo elsewhere in the *Saxon Genesis*, when Cain speaks after admitting his crime (seven occurrences for twelve lines, 58b–69a). Therefore it seems likely that the repetitive use of *nu* to express sadness and regret is more typically Old Saxon than Old English.

However, single instances of *nu* do occur in similar contexts in Old English poetry, even without Old Saxon direct influence. Aside from *Genesis B*, this use of *nu* is especially common in *Christ and Satan*, which is not surprising as a significant portion of the poem concerns Satan's laments, but other instances may also be found elsewhere, for example in *Genesis A* and *Andreas*:

¹³⁶ Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 169.

¹³⁷ 'We now intend to repay you for each of your sins where it will be most hateful to you, in the harshest spiritual struggle.'

¹³⁸ Stévanovitch, 'Cain, *Genesis B*, and the Old Saxon *Genesis*', p. 74.

quae respondit a facie Sarai dominae meae ego fugio (Gen. XVI.8)¹³⁹

'Ic fleah wean, wana wilna gehwilces,
hlæfdigan hete, hean of wicum,
tregan and teonan. *Nu* sceal tearighleor
on westenne witodes bidan,
hwonne of heortan hunger oððe wulf
sawle and sorge somed abregde.' [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2274–9)¹⁴⁰

obsecro te, domine iesu christe magister bone, quoniam sicut nobis
precepisti omnia dereliquimus et secuti sumus te. (*recensio casanatensis*,
§ 2)¹⁴¹

Hu me elpeodige inwitwrasne
searonet seowað! A ic symles wæs
on wega gehwam willan þines
georn on mode; *nu* ðurh geohða sceal
dæde fremman swa þa dumban neat. [my italics] (*Andreas*, 63–7)¹⁴²

Such uses of *nu* are clearly different from the intersubjective uses outlined above: while both speeches ostensibly have an addressee (an angel in *Genesis A* and God *in absentia* in *Andreas*), the phrase where *nu* occurs is exclusively concerned with the plight of the speaker, not with the speaker's interaction with the addressee.

Another difference is the degree to which this use of *nu* is conventionalised. This type of *nu* is relatively often combined with the modal *sculan* and with vocabulary typical of the theme of exile (expressing deprivation, sorrow and movement from or into exile),¹⁴³ but there does not seem to be any kind of standard syntactic pattern associated with that use. Furthermore, the temporal dimension is never very far

¹³⁹ 'And she answered: "As for me I flee from the sight of my mistress Sarai".'

¹⁴⁰ 'I have fled the pain, the hatred of my mistress, deprived of every desirable thing, unhappy; I have left my dwelling, fled suffering and abuse. *Now* I shall, my cheeks covered with tears, face my appointed fate in the wilderness, when from my heart hunger or a wolf will tear away both my soul and my sorrow.'

¹⁴¹ 'I beg you, lord Jesus Christ, good master, since according to what you instructed us to do we have left everything behind and we have followed you.' The corresponding passage in the *Praxeis Andreou* is translated thus by Boenig (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 2): 'Lord Jesus Christ, because we left all things behind and followed you, knowing that you are helper of all who hope in you, give heed and see what they have done to your servant Matthias, how they make me neighbor of beasts!'

¹⁴² 'How strangers weave for me pernicious chains, vicious nets! Always and continually I was eager in my mind to accomplish your will in every way; *now* with anxiety I shall have to act like the dumb beasts.' For other examples, see *Beowulf* (2910b and 3020), *Andreas* (1165b, 1414 and 1425), *Genesis A* (870, 885b and 2224b), *Genesis B* (389, 421b, 736b, 799–802, 805, 815b–819, 831 and 836), *Christ and Satan* (40b, 46, 91, 109b, 140, 155b–156, 176, 180b, 187b, 228–30, 261b, 385, 390–3 and 425b), *Juliana* (444 and 632). See also *The Wanderer* (9b, 75 and 97), *The Seafarer* (33b, 58, 82 and 90), *The Riming Poem* (43 and 45b), and *The Wife's Lament* (4b and 24).

¹⁴³ See Greenfield, 'The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of "Exile" in Anglo-Saxon Poetry'.

away. Precisely because exile (i.e. the loss of a place to belong) is the dominant topos to characterise sorrow in Old English poetry, most relevant passages draw an explicit contrast between a difficult present and a better past. This use of *nu* also shows less versatility: the stance adopted by the speaker is always that of the person crushed by sorrow. Rather than a solidified linguistic form, this device should properly be regarded as a solidified poetic topos.

NU AS A MODALISER

In Present-Day English, 'now' can be used as modaliser, i.e. to express the speaker's attitude or point of view regarding what is being discussed, for instance in phrases such as 'now, I think that' or 'now, according to me'. This use of 'now' is more subjective than intersubjective: of course the speaker is conveying their opinion to an addressee, so the intersubjective dimension is not entirely lacking, but 'now' is used primarily by the speaker to position themselves with respect to the topic rather than to interact with the addressee as such. It is difficult to make any definitive statement based on a written corpus, as intonation is often crucial in identifying the value of a pragmatic marker, but there does not seem to be much evidence of such a use of *nu* in the Old English poetic corpus: at any rate, *nu* does not seem to collocate with expressions whose primary function is to signal the speaker's opinion.

CONCLUSION

Examination of the corpus shows that *nu* is very often used as a pragmatic marker in the Old English poetic corpus. It is the most characteristic marker of verbal interaction, both in the sense that it occurs predominantly in Direct Speech and in the sense that its functions are primarily intersubjective. This is actually one of the most striking differences between Old English *nu* and Present-Day 'now': the intersubjective uses of 'now' in Present-Day English already exist in Old English, though the transition is still incomplete in that the marker seems to retain some of its lexical meaning; however, there is not much evidence for a truly subjective use of *nu*, i.e. for the use of *nu* to express an individual point of view.

Adverbial Clauses

While *nu* is by far the most common pragmatic marker in Direct Speech, a few adverbial clauses also seem to carry a pragmatic meaning and deserve attention. Typically, such clauses are quite short and have a very low semantic content. They may be introduced by *gif* or *swa* and

their verb is usually a modal or a verb of opinion or discourse, in the first or the second person. As with *nu*, such clauses typically occur in tense, dramatic situations:

Ne beoð we leng somed
willum minum, *gif ic wealdan mot*. [my italics] (*Genesis A*, 2786–7)¹⁴⁴

Do *swa þe þynce*,
fyrngidda frod, *gif ðu frugnen sie*
on wera corðre. [my italics] (*Elene*, 541b–543a)¹⁴⁵

Eard git ne const,
frecne stowe, *ðær þu findan miht*
felasinnigne secg; *sec gif þu dyrre*. [my italics] (*Beowulf*, 1377b–1379)¹⁴⁶

Ic can eow læran langsumne ræd,
gif ge willað minre mihte geleafan. (*Christ and Satan*, 248–9)¹⁴⁷

‘Nu ic *þæt gehyre þurh þinne hleoþorcwide*,
þæt ic nyde sceal niþa gebæded
mod meldian, swa þu me beodeð,
þreaned þolian. [my italics] (*Juliana*, 461–4a)¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ ‘We shall not be together any longer, according to my will, if I am allowed to have my way.’ For similar phrases, see *Genesis A*, 2253 (*gif ic mot for þe mine wealdan*, ‘if I may rule over my own in front of you’), 2475b (*gif ic mot, for eow*, ‘if I may, in front of you’), 2482b (*gif þu most*, ‘if you were allowed to’), and 2827–8a (*gif þe alwalda, ure drihten, / scirian wille*, ‘if the almighty, our lord will ordain it for you’); *Andreas*, 479b (*gif ic mehte*, ‘if I could’) and 557b (*gif ðu cumne*, ‘if you know,’ also found in *Elene*, 856b); and *Guthlac A* 592–3 (*gif eow dryhten Crist, / lifes leoftrum lyfan wylle*, ‘if the lord Christ, the origin of light and life, wants to let you do so’).

¹⁴⁵ ‘Do as you think, you who know about ancient prophecies, if you are questioned in front of the multitude.’ See also *Elene*, 597b (*swa þin mod lufað*, ‘as it pleases your mind’) and *Genesis A*, 2260b (*swa þin mod freoð*, same meaning), as well as *Beowulf*, 490b (*swa þin sefa hwette*, ‘as your heart prompts you’).

¹⁴⁶ ‘You do not know yet the dwelling, the dangerous place, where you can find the being full of sins; go seek him if you dare.’ See also *Beowulf*, 527b–528 (*gif þu Grendles dearest / nihtlongne first nean bidan*, ‘if you dare await Grendel close by all night long’); and *Andreas*, 1350b–1351 (*gif ðu furður dearest / to þam anhagan aldre geneðan*, ‘if you dare risk your life further against that single man’), where in both cases the clause is given more semantic content.

¹⁴⁷ ‘I can teach you lasting advice if you will have faith in my might.’ See also *Genesis B*, 559b–560 (*Gif þu þeah minum wilt, / wið willende, wordum hyran*, ‘if however you will, as a willing woman, listen to my words’); *Genesis A*, 2314b–2315 (*gif þu wille on me / hlaforð habban oððe holdne freond*, ‘if you will have a lord or a faithful friend in me’) and 2317b–2319a (*gif ge hyrað me / breostgehygdum and bebodu willað / min fullian*, ‘if you listen to me with your heart’s thoughts and agree to do my bidding’); and *Guthlac A*, 280b (*gif ðu us hyran wilt*, ‘if you will listen to us’).

¹⁴⁸ ‘Now I hear that through your speech, that I shall have to speak my mind, compelled by hostile acts, as you have ordered me, and to endure misery.’ See also multiple instances of *swa ic þe bidde / lære / hate* (‘as I command you’) in *Genesis A* (1332b, 1748b, 2227b, 2306a, 2325b and 2467b) and several instances of *swa þu bena eart* and closely related phrases: *Genesis A* (2250b and 2359b), *Beowulf* (352b) and *Andreas* (348b).

The comparison between the *gif*-clause in *Genesis A* and the true adverbial clause at the end of the excerpt from *Elene* is instructive. In *Elene*, the clause specifies the hypothetical circumstances for which the main clause is valid. In *Genesis A*, the information provided does not concern outside circumstances but the interaction itself: by pronouncing such words, Sarah makes it clear that she is not making a mere prediction, but that she is stating her intentions, potentially challenging Abraham's authority. The modal *motan*, which expresses the possibility granted by another, is indeed an implicit allusion to Abraham's will: it is now up to him whether he will grant her wishes or oppose her. The clause expresses both a challenge and the recognition that Abraham (and perhaps God) may prevent her from doing as she wishes. The expression is thus strongly intersubjective and constitutes an essential part of the characters' face work (i.e. what they do to protect and enhance their own 'face' while preserving the face of the addressee).

The same is true for the other clauses quoted here. They may express opposition or submission to the addressee's will, but in all cases what they do is to perform the balance of power between the two characters, outlining their will, their capacity to act and the expectations weighing on them.

In some cases, the clause is given some lexical content. When this happens, the clause is as much a description of the circumstances as a performance. When the clause is reduced to its most essential elements (e.g. *gif ic mot* or *gif þu dyrre*), however, it becomes the performance of an archetypal interaction: what is expressed is no longer the specific argument opposing Abraham and Sarah but the confrontation of two wills. When the same formula occurs in different contexts, it has the power, just like formulaic epithets, to cast the characters into a pre-existing, recognisable model. Thus the character who says *swa þu me beodeost* achieves a status identical to all the characters who have pronounced those words before or who will in the future. The character thus positions themselves not just with respect to the addressee but also with respect to other pairs of characters and, through them, with respect to a universal relationship between the one who gives orders and the one who obeys them. This move towards abstraction makes the situation more readily interpretable for the audience, as all the specificities of the circumstances are brought back to a simple, easily recognisable pattern, which makes the balance of power between the characters stand out.

Conclusion

If subjectivity is understood as the expression of an individual point of view and, more generally, as an interest in what makes individual

characters or situations unique, then it is clear that there is very little of it in Old English poetry, whether in Direct Speech or in narrative. This does not mean that Direct Speech is indistinguishable from narrative in Old English poetry. Direct Speech displays all the markers that one expects to find in discourse. However, those markers are used in a manner rather different from what a modern reader usually expects. They are not used to mark what is individual or specific but rather what is archetypal. Axiological words, terms of address and pragmatic markers all contribute to the construction of a representation that relies heavily on well-known paradigms.

This has obvious consequences for characterisation: Old English characters are not described as complex and nuanced individuals. Rather, they are performed as particular instances of a universal archetype, or, even more precisely, they are performed as interactants in a particular instance of an archetypal interaction, e.g. as a thane in front of his lord, or as two opponents facing each other.

The fact that the archetypes are presumably well known to the intended audience has important implications for reception. In a modern novel, the author is the sole possessor of the 'truth' concerning the characters (provided such a truth is to be had, which is not always the case). In an Old English poem, the audience is in a prime position to evaluate the 'truth' of the characters themselves: they share the same knowledge as the poet concerning the relevant paradigms and are therefore able to evaluate the characters and their interactions in terms of conformity or non-conformity to those norms.

A Problem with Voices

The common confusion between Direct Speech and authentic speech has massive consequences for the interpretation of texts.¹ One such consequence is the belief that it is natural for Direct Speech to serve the representation of voices distinct from the narrator's. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Certainly, in some textual traditions, it is conventional for the voices of individual characters to be sharply differentiated from each other and from the narrator's: the author may use recurring phrases or different registers and even different dialectal forms to give each voice its own unique identity. However, that possibility is merely one option among others.

A character is not an actual person; therefore their voice is not an actual voice. A text can attempt to create the illusion that the voice is real, but it can never be. A true voice is the expression of an intention, an emotion, a point of view, a capacity for action and, perhaps most importantly, a body. The composer of the poem has all that, but the character does not. The poet may, if they wish, create the illusion of all those attributes for their character, but they do not exist a priori. They are textual constructs and so is the character's voice.

Old English narrative poems, like many medieval texts, do not seem interested in attempting to create 'convincing' voices for their characters, which can be destabilising for a modern reader. This chapter examines both the modern bias for distinct voices and the handling of voices in Old English narrative poems.

Bakhtin and Dialogism

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin / Voloshinov writes several interesting chapters on Represented Speech, which he describes as 'someone else's speech'.² Bakhtin / Voloshinov is one

¹ On this confusion, see Introduction, 'Direct Speech Reinterpreted' (pp. 7–15).

² The text was first published under Voloshinov's name, but many scholars think the real author is Bakhtin, so the book is very often published under both names. In Matejka and Titunik's English translation (which is the one used here), the expression used in Part III, chapter 2, 'ЧУЖОЙ РЕЧИ', is rendered as 'reported speech' but its literal meaning is

of the first scholars to have taken an interest in the medieval representation of speeches. His approach is very interesting for at least two reasons. First, it is a Marxist approach, which means that he is not merely looking at Represented Speech from a formal or grammatical point of view, but that he is attempting to put the forms he observes in a broader social and historical context. Second, his interpretation is a very representative example of the modern bias for distinct voices.

According to Bakhtin / Voloshinov, the forms of Represented Speech favoured in a given historical period reflect the way that time envisages the discourse of others.³ Each historical period is thus characterised by a general trend in the representation of discourse, which is not the random convergence of a multitude of individual aesthetic choices but the result of the dominant ideology of the time. He identifies four major trends, associated with four different historical periods:⁴

1. *Authoritarian dogmatism*, characterized by the linear, impersonal, monumental style of reported speech transmission in the Middle Ages;
2. *Rationalistic dogmatism*, with its even more pronounced linear style in the 17th and 18th centuries;
3. *Realistic and critical individualism*, with its pictorial style and its tendency to permeate reported speech with authorial retort and commentary (end of the 18th century and early 19th century); and finally
4. *Relativistic individualism*, with its decomposition of the authorial context (the present period).⁵

The 'linear style' is characterised by the fact that the boundaries of the speech represented are sharply defined, whereas the speech itself is not very individualised stylistically, sometimes to the point that the style of the narrator's and the characters' words may be completely homogeneous. In the specific case of medieval literature, that style is notable, according to Bakhtin / Voloshinov, for its massive and almost exclusive use of Direct Speech, incorporated as 'a compact, impermeable block with little or no individualization'.⁶ For him, that

actually closer to 'another's speech' or 'someone else's speech', which is very much what Bakhtin / Voloshinov is aiming at.

³ Bakhtin / Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*: see especially pp. 116–19. According to him: 'What we have in the forms of reported speech is precisely an objective document of this reception. Once we have learned to decipher it, this document provides us with information, not about accidental and mercurial subjective psychological processes in the soul of the recipient, but about steadfast social tendencies in an active reception of other speakers' speech, tendencies that have crystallized into language forms' (p. 117).

⁴ According to Todorov, Bakhtin's later writings retain the opposition between linear and pictorial styles but adopt a much more nuanced position concerning their ties to historical periods, acknowledging for example the possibility that the two styles may have coexisted already in Antiquity (*Mikhail Bakhtine*, pp. 117–19).

⁵ Bakhtin / Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120, n. 4.

particular mode of representation is dogmatic in that it does not allow several voices to be heard and thus to start a dialogue, but it conveys a single point of view on the world, sanctioned by the community and the authorities it recognises. His analysis is mostly based on Russian and French texts, but the characteristics he lists are just as typical of Old English: long imposing speeches, sharply defined boundaries and relative stylistic homogeneity.

Bakhtin's approach is interesting, in that it recognises similarities in bodies of medieval literature and tries to account for them. However, it is also very problematic in that it is obviously biased in favour of modern literature. As noted by Todorov, that bias has two main interrelated causes: Bakhtin's admiration for Dostoevsky and his preoccupation with the notion of alterity, which plays a central role in his analysis.⁷

For Bakhtin, Represented Speech is the interaction of two voices:

Reported speech is regarded by the speaker as an utterance belonging to *someone else*, an utterance that was *originally totally independent*, complete in its construction, and lying outside the given context. Now, it is from *this independent existence* that reported speech is transposed into an authorial context ... The author's utterance, in incorporating the other utterance, brings into play syntactic, stylistic, and compositional norms for its partial assimilation ... while preserving (if only in rudimentary form) *the initial autonomy* (in syntactic, compositional, and stylistic terms) of the reported utterance, which otherwise could not be grasped in full. [my italics]⁸

Because Bakhtin understands Represented Speech as the transposition of someone else's utterance into an authorial context, he sees any attempt to curtail the autonomy of the speech represented as a dogmatic act – as the negation of alterity. For him, the ideal form of Represented Speech is one that allows very distinct voices to be heard, while letting them dialogue and even interfere with each other. His ideal literary form is thus modern literature, and especially Dostoevsky, who not only represents several subjective voices, but lets them interact without subordinating them to the domination of an all-knowing narrator with a superior status.

In his perspective, interference between the voices of the characters and the narrator is a key sign of true dialogism. Such 'reciprocal infectiousness' may be observed in all forms of Represented Speech, including in Direct Speech (through the insertion of narratorial comments or through slipping from Indirect to Direct Speech for instance), but they are the very essence of Free Indirect Speech, which, for Bakhtin, is 'in French at least, the most syntactically standardised case of an inter-

⁷ Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtine*, pp. 121–3 and, regarding alterity, pp. 145–72.

⁸ Bakhtin / Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 116.

ferential merging of two differently oriented speech acts'.⁹ Bakhtin contrasts that kind of dynamic interference with the 'primitive, inert direct discourse' of medieval literature.¹⁰

It is important to understand that Bakhtin envisions alterity in its strongest sense, as 'another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (*thou*)'.¹¹ This interpretation is obviously problematic. As shown in the Introduction to this book, Reported Speech is a misnomer. In truth, there is no original, independent, autonomous speech that can be incorporated into a narrative context. The represented speech is a creation and if there is a 'consciousness' behind it, it can only be that of the poet or perhaps that of the performer, but certainly not that of the character. Both the narrator and the characters are textual constructs. One may choose to give a character's voice more or less stylistic autonomy, but there can be no question of any 'original' autonomy being taken away. As such, criticising one particular type of construction for being less respectful of alterity than another seems unfair.

However, the fact that very similar constructions are found not just in Old English poetry but also in other medieval literatures, including in France and in Russia, suggests that Bakhtin is probably right in thinking that this cannot be a coincidence, and that what is often seen as a mere grammatical or stylistic device needs to be looked at in a broader cultural context.

This is the view adopted in this book – that the form taken by Direct Speech in Old English narrative poetry is necessarily interconnected with how the poetic community of the time (poets and listeners alike) saw characters and their 'voices'. However, rather than a 'dogmatic' ideology, it seems more likely that what can explain the similarities between otherwise distant traditions is the similar material context, i.e. the fact that all early medieval European literatures went through the same transition from a predominantly oral model to an increasingly written one.

It seems likely that such a situation would have had a strong impact on speech representation in at least two ways. First, the subtle types of interference noted by Bakhtin clearly work better with a fully literate audience, i.e. an audience who can read the text directly (instead of having it read to them) and who are well attuned to visual cues. Speech interferences are easier to spot when one is free to reread any potentially troublesome passages, and they often rely on punctuation or the use of italics to be fully intelligible. In other words, such devices are not very practicable in a medieval context.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹¹ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 192.

Additionally, the way that speech is understood in a predominantly oral culture means there can be no temptation to represent 'realistic' voices. In early medieval cultures, including in Anglo-Saxon culture, speech is understood as the production of a body – a voice without a body simply is not a voice. As such, the gap between the representation of someone's speech with words and the actual presence of someone's voice can never be bridged. In Anglo-Saxon England – and presumably in many other medieval cultures – the audience of a narrative poem will only be in the presence of one body and only hear one voice: that of the reader or performer. The relative stylistic homogeneity of the narrator's and characters' words is quite coherent from that perspective. Modern literature's desire to make several voices be heard only makes sense if one considers that mere words are enough to constitute a true voice.

The 'Voices' of the Characters

Who is Speaking?

Represented Speech, whatever form it takes, always has a dual 'origin': it is ostensibly the production of a character, which is itself (together with its words) the production of a narrator (which is itself the production of an author, but that is another story). As such, it may carry traces of either origin. Typically, in Indirect Speech, deictics and other traces of linguistic subjectivity must be interpreted with reference to the narrative context, whereas in Direct Speech they must be interpreted with reference to the situation of utterance of the Represented Speech. However, in practice, the situation is not always quite so clear-cut. Time and place deictics are usually fairly straightforward, but other markers (markers of evaluation or modality, for instance) can be more difficult to place. In some cases too, writers will deliberately blur the lines, creating the kind of 'interferences' that Bakhtin writes about.

A good example of that kind of interference may be found in *Middlemarch*. Concerning the following passage, one may borrow Bakhtin's words and say that 'almost every word ... figures simultaneously in two intersecting contexts, two speech acts: in the speech of the author-narrator (ironic and mocking) and the speech of the hero (who is far removed from irony)':¹²

¹² Bakhtin / Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 136. Bakhtin is actually commenting on the character of privy councillor Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov in 'A Nasty Story' but his comment may apply to numerous passages of modern literature.

Celia coloured, and looked very grave. 'I think, dear, we are wanting in respect to mamma's memory, to put them by and take no notice of them. And,' she added, after hesitating a little, with a rising sob of mortification, 'necklaces are quite usual now; and Madame Poinçon, who was stricter in some things even than you are, used to wear ornaments. And Christians generally – surely there are women in heaven now who wore jewels.' Celia was conscious of some mental strength when she really applied herself to argument.¹³

Celia's character is represented as quite serious here: undoubtedly, she is aware that her desire to honour her mother's memory is not her only motivation, but she defends her right to wear the jewels (a right that matters a lot to her) with all her conviction, without any distance or self-derision. Yet, behind that serious façade, one can easily perceive the gentle mocking of the narrator. Depending on whether one considers, for instance, the origin of the words 'in respect to mamma's memory' as the character's or the narrator's, the meaning is quite different.

The humour in this passage is made possible by the complex intermingling of the character's and the narrator's words. If Celia's words were represented as in Old English poetry, as a discrete block, the derision would be much harder to spot. By highlighting Celia's emotions ('coloured', 'sob of mortification') and preventing her from presenting her arguments uninterrupted, the narrator undermines the character's strategy, based on supposedly rational and moral grounds. The character's speech is in some way contaminated, and the resulting discordance creates a distance between the reader and the character's words. Conversely, the character's voice also contaminates the narrative: the words 'applied herself' are more likely chosen to reflect Celia's worldview and her memories of school, which are quite fresh, as suggested by the reference to 'Madame Poinçon'.

This kind of interference is a useful reminder that all Represented Speech is also always the responsibility of the narrator as well as the character. For such interference to be effective, however, and thus meaningful, it is necessary for the 'voices' of the character and the narrator to be otherwise distinguishable. In other words, it is indispensable for each 'voice' to have its own recognisable identity. Otherwise, it would be impossible to spot any discordance. The proliferation of such interferences in modern literature is thus the direct consequence of modern literature's fondness for the representation of very individualised voices.

In Old English narrative poetry, interference is not so much the exception as the rule, which can be destabilising for a modern reader.

¹³ Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 8 (Book I, chapter 1).

Witness, for instance, this analysis of Hagar's speech to the angel (*Genesis A*, 2271–95), by Clemoes:

Knowledge of direct speech in moral Latin narratives such as this,¹⁴ it seems reasonable to suppose, encouraged another Englishman, the anonymous poet of *Genesis A*, telling in the vernacular with strict fidelity to the biblical text the story of God's purposes working themselves out, to take the licence (rare for him) of supposing that Hagar, Sarah's servant, gave a highly contrived account of her situation in reply to an angel's questioning of why she was alone in the wilderness ... This is definitely a servant who has risen above her station. The well-contrived sound-play (*fleah wean, wana ... hean*) concluding with an alliterative pairing ('*tregan and teonan*'), the stylish pictorial allusion to grief (*tearigh-leor*) and the dramatic image of the outcome elegantly presented with zeugma ... all bespeak a delicate mastery of formal rhetoric which would have graced her mistress herself. One can appreciate how Sarah had come to feel that Hagar, now bearing Abraham's child at Sarah's own instigation, was upstaging her.¹⁵

This analysis is very problematic. Admittedly, there are instances in Old English poetry where it seems the poet is deliberately establishing a contrast between the rhetorical skills of two different characters to better emphasise one character's superiority. One obvious example is the confrontation of Beowulf and Unferth (506–606), where Beowulf's tale surpasses Unferth's, both because it is meant to be closer to the truth and because of its greater length and elaboration.¹⁶ In hagiographic poems, Bjork also notes several instances where a contrast is perceptible between the harmonious speeches of saints and the more chaotic retorts of their adversaries.¹⁷ For instance, when Juliana challenges her opponents, her style is as constant as her arguments, particularly with her recurring use of the adverb *næfre* in initial position, whereas her opponents tend to change tactics rather abruptly, so that their threats tend to pile up rather haphazardly.

The significance of such instances should not be overstated. Beowulf's speeches are always competent, but only in the confrontation with Unferth is there the sense that his rhetorical skills are above those of another character. Generally speaking, the style of the poem is quite homogeneous. It is only because Unferth's and Beowulf's

¹⁴ Clemoes is making reference to a letter from Boniface to Eadburg in which a monk's vision is discussed.

¹⁵ Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*, pp. 296–7.

¹⁶ See in particular Silber, 'Rhetoric as Prowess in the Unferð Episode'. See also above, pp. 31–4.

¹⁷ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*. Bjork analyses speeches from *Guthlac A*, *Juliana*, *Elene*, *Guthlac B* and *Andreas*. In some cases, Bjork may be exaggerating the actual contrast between the rhetorical skills displayed by the antagonists, but several of his examples are very compelling.

speeches occur shortly after one another and because they both attempt to deliver the truth about the same topic that they invite comparison. The same goes for *Juliana*. She and her opponents clearly represent the two opposing sides of a conflict and the central issue is to determine which side is saying the truth about true protection and true divinity. In that type of context, it makes sense for the poet to want to make one speech sound more convincing than the other(s).

However, the effect is merely punctual. Just because a contrast is established between two speeches at one point in a poem does not mean that a character is represented as speaking consistently better than another or differently from another. Generally speaking, there is no evidence of an Anglo-Saxon poet ever assigning a distinctive style to any character: angels, anonymous crowds, princes and demons speak remarkably similarly.

As such, Clemoes's comment regarding *Genesis A* is surprising. The passage he refers to is very different from the confrontations between Unferth and Beowulf or between Juliana and her opponents. Sarah has spoken shortly before, but she is not shown interacting with Hagar and the two speeches have too little in common to invite comparison. Quite aside from the fact that noting what Sarah herself feels about it ('Sarah had come to feel ...') presupposes a reconstruction of events never told in the poem (for instance a scene where Sarah would have heard Hagar speak, which is never the case in *Genesis A*), the perception of Hagar's speech as the expression of an individual style seems questionable.

In fact, Hagar's speech is more representative of the conventional expression of exile in Old English poetry than of any individual style. Estrangement from one's home, sorrow and deprivation are all staple elements of the topos and the passage is very similar to another exile's speech in the poem: Cain's speech, which is likewise much more elaborate in *Genesis A* than in the source. In his speech too the poet plays with the sounds of *wean* (*wean on wenum*, 'expectation of sorrow', 1027a) and uses striking visual images (*Ic his blod ageat, / dreor on eorðan*, 'I shed his blood, gore on the earth', 1030b–1031a). Both characters also use the modal *sculan* to discuss their oncoming death at the end of their speeches.

There is substantial evidence that the quality of Hagar's speech is not so much a commentary on her social status (something that would have no equivalent in the rest of the corpus), but rather the reflection of a general interest for the theme of exile in Old English poetry.¹⁸ In fact, whenever the text of the Vulgate finds an echo in popular themes

¹⁸ Cf. Pasternack's analysis of the use of the theme of exile in *The Wanderer*, quoted above, Chapter 4, n. 22. A similar view is offered by Mize, who, after analysing Hagar's speech, comments that 'attention is likely to be given to the emotional states or mental qualities

of Old English poetry, the *Genesis A* poet tends to expand on the source and provide a richer, more elaborate translation. It occurs with passages touching on exile, but also with passages describing battles, such as the war of the kings (1960–2095, corresponding to Gen. XIV.5–17).

In other words, one must acknowledge that Hagar's elaborate words are not so much her own but the narrator's or the poet's. If this is interference, then the interference is massive and systematic. We cannot suppose that the audience is meant to believe that Hagar – or Beowulf for that matter – commonly speaks in verse. Hagar and Beowulf speak in verse because they are characters in stories and the stories are told in verse.

Christian Words in Pagan Mouths

One well-known crux of Old English poetry concerns the use of Christian vocabulary by supposedly pagan characters. Some of the most famous examples include Hrothgar's references to an almighty god whose attributes closely resemble those of the Christian God (e.g. *Beowulf*, 928–31),¹⁹ Judith's prayer to the Trinity (*Judith*, 83–94a)²⁰ and this passage from *Elene*, where Judas, who has not yet converted, speaks like a true Christian:

Ego scio, quia quæstionem vult facere ligni, in quod Christum suspend-
erunt patres nostri (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 5)²¹

‘Ic wat geare
þæt hio wile secan be ðam sigebeame
on ðam þrowode þeoda waldend,
eallra gnyrna leas, godes agen bearn,
þone orscyldne eofota gehwylces
þurh hete hengen on heanne beam
in fyrndagum fæderas usse. (*Elene*, 419b–425)²²

of any character who occupies an experiential position for which there exists a traditional repertoire of expressive devices' (*Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 79).

¹⁹ The Christian dimension of the poem is probably one of its most debated issues. For a general summary of the issue and more detailed bibliographic references, see Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, pp. lxxvii–lxxix. On the narrator's and the characters' use of Christian references more particularly, see Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, especially chapter 2 ('Apposed Word Meanings and Religious Perspectives', pp. 29–59), which has been criticised by Irving in 'Christian and Pagan Elements'. On Hrothgar's character, see also Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics', which has been criticised by Norton in 'Tolkien, Beowulf, and the Poet'.

²⁰ See Hill, 'Invocation of the Trinity and the Tradition of the *Lorica* in Old English Poetry'.

²¹ 'I personally know that she wants to interrogate us concerning the wood on which our fathers have hung Christ'.

²² 'I know very well that she wants to enquire about the beam of victory on which the master of nations has suffered, innocent of any sin, God's own son, guiltless of any crime: out of hatred our fathers hung him on high gallows in the days of old.'

The Old English poem goes much further than the Latin source. It is true that the Latin text uses the word *Christum* (from the Greek *χριστός*, 'the anointed one', i.e. the Messiah), which, in itself, is an acknowledgement of Jesus as the Saviour the Jewish people were waiting for, but that acknowledgement is much less strong and explicit than in Cynewulf's adaptation. The Latin text leaves open the possibility that Judas is merely quoting the word used among Christians without necessarily taking responsibility for it. In the Old English text, however, the reference is much too detailed and emphatic – especially regarding Jesus' innocence – to be accounted for in this way.

This peculiarity is usually explained on theological grounds. Bridges suggests thus:

The Jews are from the start characterized by epithets denoting their wisdom ... The wisest among them, Judas, is even seen ... to designate Jesus with Christian formulas like *sunu meotudes* (461) and *godes agen bearn* (422), prior to his conversion. This is not anachronistic, but an indication that the Jews as the recipients of divine revelation possess knowledge which they have repressed, and of which the recuperation – like that of the poet's hidden art (see the epilogue) – constitutes conversion.²³

Campbell also analyses the passage in light of Judas's conversion, but in a more personal fashion: for him, Judas is represented as a person who knows the truth about Christ, but who has not yet achieved an intimate conviction, who is not yet inhabited by the Christian faith.²⁴ Just like the poet in the epilogue, who explains how his past sins prevented him from perceiving the whole truth until God granted him a revelation, Judas would thus be in need of a conversion to transform his factual knowledge into true belief.

Calder's approach is also theological, but slightly different:

Critics have commented that Judas, in this confession, seems to be almost 'sympathetic' toward Christianity. That, however, misses the point. The absolute truth of Christianity is revealed here, not Judas's 'sympathy.' Even the recalcitrant Jew falls inevitably into Christian rhetoric when recounting the Crucifixion ... In such a context, truth majestically overrides ignorance.²⁵

Calder's interpretation takes the issue away from the character itself. Quite rightly, he points out that the Christian vocabulary is appropriate, not to the character, but to any speech about Crucifixion, whoever delivers it. However, Calder still retains a somewhat literal

²³ Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, p. 237.

²⁴ Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations'. See also Klein, who presents very similar arguments regarding all the Jewish characters represented in the poem in 'Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 57.

²⁵ Calder, *Cynewulf*, p. 119.

interpretation of the speech in that he suggests that it is in the represented world that Christian truth triumphs and not in the representation itself. In other words, for Calder, the Jewish characters in the story cannot escape the Christian truth and the poet is only showing that fact.

I think that it is actually more likely that the Christian vocabulary is the poet's (or the narrator's) and not the characters'. Just like metre, Christian vocabulary should probably be regarded as an integral part of the poet's diction, something he is unlikely to discard no matter which character is speaking, for the same reason he is unlikely to have any character speak in prose. Oral-formulaic theory has shown that traditional poetics are characterised by the intimate association of some recurring ideas and some formulas to express them.²⁶ In other words, to each traditional idea (in this case Crucifixion) corresponds a specific vocabulary and it is that vocabulary that the poet is using here.

This type of interference is very different from the kind exhibited in the extract from *Middlemarch* quoted above. First of all, what encroaches on the character's voice is not the narrator's own voice but rather the poetic tradition's. Second, there is no true discordance – and thus no distance created between the reader and the character – as nothing clashes with the Christian discourse. We know that Judas is supposed to be Jewish, but his 'voice' never sounds like a 'Jewish voice', distinct from the 'Christian voice' of the narrator. It is not so much that a Jewish voice gets contaminated by a Christian voice, but rather that the traditional Christian vocabulary extends to the whole poem, even where a modern reader would expect a different voice and a different vocabulary.

What is true of Judas also holds for all the enemies of Christianity represented in the corpus. Comparison between the satanic speeches of Old English poetry and those of *Paradise Lost* is quite instructive:

'Hwær com engla ðrym,
þe we on heofnum habban sceoldan?
... Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu dreamas hefdon,
song on swegle selrum tidum,
þær nu ymb ðone æcan æðele stondað,
heleð ymb hehseld, herigað drihten
wordum and wercum, and ic in wite sceal

²⁶ See for instance Lord, 'Perspectives on Recent Work on the Oral Traditional Formula', p. 46: 'This part is related directly to the subject matter of the songs, the idea expressed by the story teller in song. That is to say, there is a specific given body of formulas and formulaic expressions, not just any phrases, but traditional phrases tied to the traditional idea and subjects of the songs.' The idea is already implicit in Parry's definition of the formula: 'a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea' [my italics], see 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making I', p. 80.

A Problem with Voices

bidan in bendum, and me bættran ham
for oferhygdum æfre ne wene.' (*Christ and Satan*, 36–50)²⁷

Is þæs ænga styde ungelic swiðe
þam oðrum ham þe we ær cuðon,
hean on heofonrice ... Næfð he þeah riht gedon
þæt he us hæfð befællad fyre to botme,
helle þære hatan, heofonrice benumen ...
 Þæt me is sorga mæst,
þæt Adam sceal, þe wæs of eorðan geworht,
minne stronglican stol behealdan,
wesam him on wyne, and we þis wite þolien,
hearm on þisse helle. Wa la, ahte ic minra handa geweald
and moste ane tid ute weorðan,
wesam ane winterstunde, þonne ic mid þys werode –
Ac licgað me ymbe irenbenda,
rideð racentan sal. (*Genesis B*, 356–72a)²⁸

Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since He
Who now is Sov'reign can dispose and bid
What shall be right. Farthest from Him is best
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above His equals. Farewell, happy fields
Where joy forever dwells! Hail horrors! hail
Infernal world! And thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor, one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time!
The mind is its own place and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven. (*Paradise Lost*, I, 242–55)

Milton's Satan does not speak a radically different language, but he uses it in a non-Christian way. At first, he does acknowledge the worth of what he has lost and the lack of appeal of what he has gained, thus recognizing the traditional values attached to heaven and hell, but

²⁷ 'Where has gone the angelic glory that we owned by right in heaven? ... Why, before in the presence of the lord we had joy, singing in heaven in better times, where now noble men surround the eternal one, heroes around the throne, and praise the lord with words and deeds, but I must endure torment in bonds and never, because of my pride, hope for a better home.'

28 'This solitary place is very different from the other home that we knew before, above in the kingdom of heaven ... However, he acted wrongly when he had us fall deep into the fire, in this burning hell, after having deprived us of the kingdom of heaven ... The greatest sorrow for me is that Adam, who was made out of clay, shall hold my powerful throne, that he shall live in joy and we suffer this torment, pain in this hell. Alas, had I in my hands the power and were I allowed to go out for a while, to be out for one winter hour, then with this troop I – But iron bonds encircle me, chains oppress me.'

then he decides to embrace his fate and to turn his vocabulary upside down, to match the reversal of his own fate. The best home is no longer in heaven, but 'farthest from him' in hell.

Nothing of the sort occurs in *Christ and Satan*, where the best home is still unambiguously heaven, even after the Fall. The figure of Satan in *Genesis B*, which has on occasions been compared to that in *Paradise Lost*,²⁹ is less resigned. He criticises God's actions (*Næfð he þeah riht gedon*) and still intends to take up arms. However, he does not go as far as making a home of his place of exile. The connection between *ham* and the heavenly kingdom – a true *topos* of Old English poetry – remains intact. For that Satan, 'the other home' (*þam oðrum ham*) remains desirable and the throne he longs for is still in heaven. The complete reversal of words and values operated by Milton's Satan seems unthinkable here.

It is that absence of any truly dissenting voice in several medieval literary traditions (including Old English poetry) that led Bakhtin to call them dogmatic. However, there is nothing to say that poetry should necessarily express several dissenting voices. When lyrical poems convey a single voice, no one is shocked or disappointed. Few people would call Shakespeare's sonnets dogmatic and yet they do not express several dissenting voices. The reason why modern readers can be disappointed by the lack of distinct voices in Old English poetry is because we base our expectations mostly on modern literature and that experience has taught us that it is fine for certain literary genres to express a single, unified voice, but that narratives with several speaking characters should convey several different voices. There is nothing natural or obvious about that expectation and it was clearly not shared by Anglo-Saxon poets.

To call medieval literature dogmatic because it does not meet an anachronistic standard is of course rather unfair. More importantly, it is to misjudge the inherent instability of the 'voices' of early medieval poetry. The previous chapter has shown that characters are not given very stable characterisations: they are constantly being redefined by new epithets and those epithets are chosen because they fit a particular stance in a particular context rather than because they reflect a stable 'personality'.³⁰ Similarly, characters are not given very stable voices. The style of a character's speech may appear particularly harmonious or powerful in some circumstances, but it is not endowed with stable, distinctive features. Characters' voices are thus rudimentary in at least

²⁹ On the possible influence of *Genesis B* on Milton, see Stévanovitch, *La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, vol. 1, pp. 1–5.

³⁰ See particularly pp. 156–8. On the idea that characters in Old English poetry are not given stable characterisation, see also Lionarons, 'Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender in Cynewulf's *Elene*', which shows that in that poem gender identity is not essentialised or static, as the same character can 'cite' masculine or feminine paradigms.

two ways. First, stylistic discrepancies between various speeches or between speeches and the narrative are very limited. Second, those discrepancies are not used to single out one character's voice but rather one type of speech (a lament, an accusation, a profession of faith, etc.).

What is going on in Old English narrative poems is more than just interference. There is a constitutive 'enunciative trouble' that goes much beyond mere stylistic homogeneousness. Characters' voices are not thought of as stable, distinct entities, and neither is the narrator's. The latter point is particularly worth noting, as it is sufficient to contradict Bakhtin's accusation of dogmaticism. Bakhtin's interpretation suggests that one all-powerful voice is crushing all others, but in fact the narrative voice itself is very rudimentary.

The Narrator's Voice

The way the narrators refer to themselves is particularly symptomatic of the trouble with the narrator's voice. In Old English narrative poems, references to the narrator are rare, usually quite short and very conventional. As such, one cannot expect them to help construct a very elaborate narrative figure, but we could expect a relatively stable and coherent entity. However, such is not the case – there are numerous instances where that coherence is threatened. The most obvious sign of instability is the hesitation between singular and plural forms. Many poems use both and it is not always clear why.

The very first lines of *Beowulf* use a plural form (1–2, *Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum, / þeodcýninga, þrym gefrunon*, 'Listen! We have heard about the glory of the kings of the nation of the Danes long ago'), but later on only singular forms are used.³¹ That shift is understandable: after claiming common ground with the audience by drawing attention to the knowledge they are supposed to share, the narrator takes individual responsibility for telling the story.³²

In some other cases, though, it is much more difficult to discern a logic in the shifts from plural to singular and vice versa. Thus, in

³¹ Twelve instances overall: lines 38, 62, 74, 1011, 1027, 1196, 1197, 2155, 2172, 2694, 2752 and 2773.

³² According to Brinton, the pragmatic use of *hwæt* to start a story has a role to play in that type of strategy. For her, *hwæt* behaves much like 'you know' in Present-Day English in that it allows the speaker to claim shared knowledge with the audience and thus to create a form of complicity with them. She notes that the marker frequently co-occurs with markers of evidentiality (i.e. markers indicating the origin of the speaker's knowledge), which shows that they are complementary: *hwæt* allows the speaker to call into question what the audience knows and markers of evidentiality allow them to offer to contribute to that knowledge, the overall suggestion being that knowledge is something to be shared and constructed together. See 'The Development of Discourse Markers in English', especially pp. 55–8.

Genesis A, the narrator only uses plural forms at first (1, 227b, 939, 969b, 995b–997, 1121b, 1723b and 1630b), then one singular form (1960a), then a plural one (2013–14), then several singular ones (2060a, 2244a, 2484a and 2542a) and then two plural ones again (2612b and 2565b). In two instances (1 and 995b–997), the plural makes perfect sense because the form refers to the Christian community as a whole and not just to the narrator. In most others, it seems that a choice is operated between two formulas: *ic ... gefraegn* in the on-verse and *us gewritu secgað* or a similar phrase in the off-verse. The two formulas are very similar as both allow the narrator to refer to their sources. The apparent difference between an oral and a written source does not seem to reflect a reality, as far as can be ascertained from the text – in all cases the source for the information is the Bible.

The two formulas are not strictly equivalent, however. References to an oral source often intervene in dramatic and conflictual contexts, particularly when the poem expands on the source to make the story more obviously heroic. It is particularly noticeable when Abraham confronts the enemies of Sodom (2060a) and, to a lesser extent, when the narrator relates God's vengeance on Sodom (2542a). As for references to writing, they seem more commonly used for factual information (the presence of Gold in Havila, 227b; Cain and Abel's occupations, 969b; Adam's progeny, 1121b; the name of Lot's youngest daughter's child, 2612b).

Admittedly, the difference is not always entirely clear-cut. When Lot's wife is transformed into a pillar of salt, the scene is represented in a very dramatic way, with much more elaboration than in the source, so one might expect the oral formula and yet it is the one referring to a written source that is used, perhaps because the poet felt that something so incredible had to be backed up by the biblical text itself to be accepted.³³

Still, it seems that the choice of a particular formula may be used to signal a certain kind of content and perhaps also a certain kind of stance for the narrator: the literal meaning of the oral formula implies that the narrator acts as an intermediary in a transmission process whereas the literate formula seems to conflate the narrator with all those who have access to the same books. However, the criteria for choosing one of the two formulas are clearly local. As a consequence, no coherent narrative figure emerges from that series of choices.

Furthermore, it does not seem that plural forms in *Genesis A* are consistently associated with a representation of the narrator as a mere repository of a traditional tale. In this passage, a plural form is used even though the narrator is referring to their own activity as a speaker:

³³ My thanks to Colette Stévanovitch for suggesting this interpretation.

We þæt soð magon
secgan furður, hwelc siððan wearð
æfter þæm gehnæste herewulfa sið,
þara þe læddon Loth and leoda god,
suðmonna sinc, sigore gulpon. (*Genesis A*, 2013b–2017)³⁴

In *Andreas*, references to the narrator are very few (only five instances) and yet they are also inconsistent. For the most part, the poem is similar in this respect to *Beowulf*: the poem starts with roughly the same formula in the plural (1, *Hwæt! We gefrunan on fyrndagum*, ‘Listen! We have heard long ago’) while later references use the singular (360, 1093 and 1706). There is, however, one very unusual passage in the poem where the narrator describes their task:

Hwæt, ic hwile nu haliges lare,
leoðgiddinga, lof þæs þe worhte,
wordum wemde, wyrd undyrne
ofer min gemet. Mycel is to secganne,
langsum leornung, þæt he in life adreag,
eall æfter orde. Þæt scell æglæwra
mann on moldan þonne ic me tælige
findan on ferðe, þæt fram fruman cunne
eall þa earfeðo þe he mid elne adreah,
grimra guða. Hwæðre git sceolon
lytlum sticcum leoðworda dæl
furður reccan. (*Andreas*, 1478–89a)³⁵

The narrator is insisting – admittedly adopting a very standard humble stance – on their own incapacity as an individual to perform the task at hand satisfactorily. And yet, when they are about to resume their narrative, they suddenly switch to a plural form, for no obvious reason: the use of the adverbs *hwile nu* and *furður* suggests there is continuity with what precedes and what follows so there does not seem to be any reason for the identity of the narrator to change at this point.

Such shifts from singular to plural references to the narrator (and

³⁴ ‘We can say the truth further, what became the fate of the battle wolves later on after the conflict, of those who led Lot and the peoples’ goods, the treasure of the southern men; they boasted of victory.’

³⁵ ‘Listen! I have now for a while misrepresented with my words the teachings of the holy man, the poem, the praise of what he has done, a fate revealed beyond my capacities. It is a lot of work, a long learning process, to tell what he achieved in his life, everything from the start. It would require a cleverer person on earth than I reckon myself to be to find in their mind the knowledge of all the hardships, the fierce battles that from the beginning he faced with courage. However we shall tell another portion of verse, for a little while.’ This passage has been commented on by Earl (‘The Typological Structure of *Andreas*’, p. 69), Foley (‘The Poet’s Self-Interruption in *Andreas*’) and Olsen (*Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft*, pp. 129–30).

vice versa) are relatively common in Old English narrative poetry,³⁶ but they are not the only troubling feature of narrators' voices. In some cases, it is the very presence of a narrator that is problematic. In Cynewulf's poems, there is a sharp contrast between very distanced narratives, with very little narratorial intervention, and epilogues dominated by a repentant *I*. The contrast is all the more intriguing in that it is not perfect. For instance, in *Elene*, the incipit is very factual and 'objective'. Instead of a traditional opening formula, the poet has chosen to use a very precise – albeit incorrect – historical date.³⁷ The end of the narrative section is shorter, but it follows the same pattern, with a precise date for the end of Elene's mission. In both cases, the information is already present in the source, but the poet could easily have rephrased those passages to include a formula more typical of Old English poetry, so we must assume the choice is deliberate. And yet, within the narrative itself, when the expedition of the empress is described in a thoroughly conventional manner,³⁸ the poet cannot resist the use of the formula *Ne hyrde ic sið ne ær* (240b, 'I have never heard, neither before nor since').³⁹ Apart from the epilogue, this is the only instance of the first person to refer to the narrator in that poem, which makes it look rather anomalous.

Something similar, though less striking, occurs in *Juliana*, where, aside from the epilogue, there is only one reference to the narrator, in the first person. The 'anomaly' is less jarring, however, as the reference occurs in the opening formula, which is in itself a very typical feature. Still, it seems as if, in both poems, Cynewulf is tempted by a narrative model without any visible (or audible) sign of the presence of a narrator, but without being able or willing to achieve full consistency.

In the poems examined here, the most 'anomalous' in this respect is undeniably *Christ and Satan*. In some sections, the narrative is very neutral, without any reference to a narrator (fitt I to III, 1–188; fitt VIII, 365–440); in others, the poem sounds like a sermon, with many first-person plural markers, especially with injunctions (IV, 189–224; VI, 254–314; end of X, 545–56 and 579–658); and in others still the narrative sounds fairly 'traditional' with occasional references to the narrator's oral sources (V, 224–53; beginning of X, 511–44).

If taken literally, those references to oral sources are somewhat

³⁶ Aside from the examples quoted here, one may also mention *Exodus*, *Fates of the Apostles* and *The Phoenix*, each of which contains both singular and plural references to the narrator.

³⁷ The incipit places the beginning of Constantine's rule in AD 227 whereas he only became an emperor in 306. On the historical inconsistencies in the poem, see in particular Kretzschmar, 'Anglo-Saxon Historiography and Saints' Lives'.

³⁸ On the Old English topos of the voyage at sea, see Diamond, 'Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry'.

³⁹ Cf. *Beowulf*, 38a, 1197 and 1842b.

problematic. In traditional secular poetry, formulas based on *ic gefrægn* suggest the idea that a witness of the events told the story to another person, who told it to another until it reached the narrator of the poem. When what is told is a speech supposedly spoken by Satan in hell, such a scenario is of course hardly plausible. If one translates *Ða get ic furðor gefregen feonas ondetan* (224) as 'Then I heard the enemies confess further' instead of 'Then I have heard [people say] that the enemies admitted further' one may come, like Finnegan, to the conclusion that the narrator had to be there in person.⁴⁰

This attitude impresses on us that the narrator has actually spent time in hell, starting with the devil's first arrival: he tells us what he heard Satan and the host of lesser demons say on a number of occasions, and describes how Satan looked when he 'sparked' while speaking.⁴¹

Finnegan goes even further as he claims that the narrator can only be Christ himself. That conclusion is of course very problematic. It may be true that the only character in the poem that could possibly know all the events described is Christ himself, but there is no evidence whatsoever in the poem that the narrator is meant to be a character or an identifiable figure.⁴²

Something very similar occurs in *Daniel*, where the narrator uses the phrase *þa geseah ic* ('then I saw') to describe the fall of Israel into sin in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Again, the only entity that could possibly have seen such a thing is God ... or a kind of omniscient narrator. The use of the phrase *geseah ic* is interesting because it echoes similar phrases used by the narrator of the *Dream of the Rood* or even that of *Vǫlospá*.⁴³ It is entirely possible – and indeed the story of Cædmon suggests it – that there once existed a Germanic tradition or myth according to which poets gained access to their stories through dreams, and the phrase *geseah ic* might reflect that.

However, there is an important difference between *Dream of the Rood* and *Daniel*. In *Dream of the Rood*, references to the narrator consistently construct the figure of a dreamer retelling their own experience. Nothing of the sort occurs in *Daniel* (or *Christ and Satan* for that matter), where *geseah ic* only occurs once and is not supported by any

⁴⁰ Another passage suggesting the presence of the narrator in hell is found on verse 455a, when the narrator speaks as if they had seen the scene with their own eyes: *þæt, la, wæs fæger* ('how beautiful it was!').

⁴¹ Finnegan, 'Christ as Narrator in the Old English *Christ and Satan*', p. 4.

⁴² Furthermore, Finnegan himself notes that Christ is referred to in the third person in the poem (*ibid.*, p. 10).

⁴³ In the *Dream of the Rood*, *geseah ic* is used four times (14b, 21b, 33b and 51b). References to the narrator are very confusing in the Old Norse poem *Vǫlospá*, but one may note several uses of the verb of perception *sjá* ('to see') associated with the prophetess, in the first or third person (e.g. *sá hon*, 'she saw', § 30, 35, 38 and 39; *ec sá*, 'I saw', § 31).

other element in the text. It seems that the phrase is used locally to make the account sound more convincing but there is no consistent attempt to represent the narrator as a kind of prophet or omniscient figure.

Generally speaking, it seems that consistency is the exception rather than the rule. Even in *Guthlac A*, where references to the narrator occur relatively regularly and always in the plural,⁴⁴ there is some instability. In some cases (32–4, 48–9, 526–8 and 763–7), the plural obviously refers to the Christian community (and perhaps more specifically to a community of monks)⁴⁵ rather than to a narratorial figure as such. In others, the reference is clearly to the role of the narrator: both as the repository of an oral tradition and as a narrator strictly speaking (e.g. 93–4, *Magun we nu nemnan þæt us neah gewearð / þurh haligne had gecyþed*, ‘We may now tell about what has been brought to us, revealed in a holy way’; see also 108a). The first type of references is to the narrator and their community in the ‘real world’ whereas the second is to the narrator as a narrator (and the narrative community, i.e. the people involved in the transmission of stories).

However, there are instances where it is not so easy to tell the two categories apart, as in this passage:

we þæs Guðlaces
deorwyrðne dæl dryhtne cennað. (*Guthlac A*, 182b–183)⁴⁶

Is it the community of Christians that see Guthlac that way or is it the community of people who know and share his story? The same ambiguity can be found in this passage:

Hwylc wæs fægerra
willa geworden in wera life,
þara þe ylðran usse gemunde,
opþe we selfe siþþan cupen? (*Guthlac A*, 748b–751)⁴⁷

Is this *we*, possessed with a wealth of shared knowledge (some from personal experience, some handed down by past generations), the same kind of *we* found in the opening formulas of *Beowulf*, *Andreas*

⁴⁴ There are eight relevant passages for 818 lines, with fewer instances in the centre of the poem (32–4, 48–9, 93, 108, 182b–183, 526–8, 748b–754a and 763–7).

⁴⁵ The hypothesis that the poem is designed for such an audience is defended by Jones in ‘Envisioning the *cenobium* in the Old English *Guthlac A*’. One of the references to the first person designates a community serving God, which may be understood in a loose sense as a community of Christians, but which might designate more specifically a monastic community (32b–34, *We þæs ryht magun / æt æghwylcum anra gehyran, / gif we halig bebodu healdan willað*, ‘We may rightly serve in any one of those if we want to obey the holy commands’).

⁴⁶ ‘We ascribe the noble part of Guthlac to the lord.’

⁴⁷ ‘What more beautiful desire has come to the life of men, among those our elders remember or those we have learned ourselves?’

and *Juliana* and thus a narratorial instance? The fact that the question is not so easy to answer is in itself significant.

If the narratorial *we* was radically distinct from the *we* referring to the community of Christians, it would be possible to consider that the plural used in narratorial formulas is not a true plural, but merely a fossilised turn of phrase. The fact that there is continuity between the canonical narratorial formula *Hwæt! We ... gefrunon* and passages in *Guthlac A* describing a knowledge shared by the community suggests that such is not the case. It seems very likely that, even in the most conventional use of the narratorial formula, *we* is still meant to suggest the idea of a community of people.

If so, then the constant oscillation between singular and plural forms is not a mere stylistic incoherence – it is significant. It means that there is a problem with the narratorial figure itself. It is not just referred to in different ways, but it is conceived of in different ways: sometimes non-existent, sometimes as an individual and sometimes as a community where even those who do not speak share knowledge with the speaker and stand on an equal footing with them.

This fluctuation between individual and collective responsibility for the narrative reflects a reality of traditional storytelling, where the author is both one and several, as explained by Lord:

The author of an oral epic is the performer insofar as he is the author of that specific song. The generic song on the other hand has no original author but, in a way, a multiplicity of authors.⁴⁸

To imagine and construct a single unified narrator, omniscient and omnipotent, sole possessor of all the secrets of the narrative, similar to the narrators of Victorian literature, can only have been an impossible (and even absurd) task in a context where every story belonged to the community. In an oral culture, the stories are known by all and so are the forms used to express them (formulas, themes and type-scenes as they are called today). Moreover, stories only exist when they are told to an audience. In that kind of context, *I* can only refer to a performer, not to the authority responsible for the story. The lack of a fully constituted narratorial *I* in Old English narrative poetry is additional proof of the persistence of orality in poetry even after writing came into use.

Old English poetry may not let an alternative discourse be heard in its texts, but it is not conveyed by a unified and totalising voice either. The narratorial voice of Old English poems is always plural in some way. Harris describes that phenomenon as a kind of ‘ventriloquism’:

For if modern literature with its striving for ‘originality’ still speaks with many and borrowed voices, participating in an infinite regress of texts,

⁴⁸ Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, pp. 101–2.

how much more do we hear the ventriloquism of tradition in a work like *Beowulf*.⁴⁹

The introduction of a Latin Christian culture in Anglo-Saxon England may have brought new voices to the concert, but it does not appear to have fundamentally changed the paradigm.

It is important to understand that the various 'voices' contributing to the text (notably all the sources used by the poet and all the speakers in the poem) do not constitute true polyphony, at least not in the usual sense. Whether polyphony is understood as a dialogue between several voices or, in a musical sense, as a harmony to which several voices contribute, it is always understood that each voice retains its own identity. The voices may mingle to the point that it becomes difficult to tell them apart, but they have to remain sufficiently distinct so that the piece does not turn into (at best) a monophonic chorus or (at worst) a mere hubbub.

Old English poetry is neither monophonic nor a hubbub, but it is not quite polyphonic either, contrary to what Niles argues:

Is *Beowulf*'s wisdom the same as that of Wiglaf, who regrets that his king did not leave ill enough alone? And none of these voices is autonomous. All are the work of our arch-ventriloquist, the narrator, who seems equally sympathetic to each point of view while at the same time he remains in possession of a superior wisdom grounded in both hindsight and Christian doctrine. Some people, following Bakhtin ... may think that polyglossia went out of fashion in literature composed between late antiquity and the Renaissance. If so, they have not read *Beowulf*.⁵⁰

Much can be learned about *Beowulf*, I believe, by approaching it as a polyphonic work whose messages are contingent and sometimes contrary. Rather than reflecting the stable conditions of a single or simple age, *Beowulf* represents a broad collective response to changes that affected a complex society during a period of major transformations.⁵¹

Niles is, of course, right to question the supposed dogmatic monophony of medieval literature. However, he exaggerates the differences between the voices of the characters in the poem. *Beowulf* and Wiglaf use the same diction and convey essentially the same ideology, even if they do not say exactly the same things. Most problematic, however, is Niles's representation of the narrator as a strong entity, with full control over the voices they orchestrate, with their own point of view (distinct from the characters') and with a sensibility sufficiently manifest for

⁴⁹ Harris, 'Beowulf's Last Words', p. 32.

⁵⁰ Niles, 'Introduction: *Beowulf*, Truth, and Meaning', p. 11.

⁵¹ Niles, *Homo Narrans*, p. 123.

the audience to be able to perceive their sympathy (or lack thereof) for other points of view. Such a hypothesis is contradicted by the very limited presence of the narrator in the poem.

The trouble inherent to the voices of the characters and the narrator in Old English poetry compels us to reject both the dogmatic hypothesis and the polyphonic hypothesis to acknowledge a traditional paradigm anterior to the development of the narratorial instance. The Old English narrator is neither tyrannic nor benevolent – it is an as yet very rudimentary tool, which plays a minimal part in the orchestration of the voices in the text. What prevents the voices of Old English poems from being submerged by cacophonia is not the existence of a central figure anchoring the text and its multiple voices but the conventions of the poetic tradition, which guarantee harmony (both regarding the form and the topics) in spite of the multiplicity. Without that traditional diction and ideology, there would be chaos – neither the narrator's voice nor the characters' have sufficient autonomy to subsist without that common ground.

Conclusion

Old English poetry does not display multiple voices in the way that (post)modern literature does. Centuries of written habits and decades of studies in narratology have taught us to expect texts to represent multiple layers of subtly delineated 'voices'. Such 'voices' are not true voices. They are not produced by vocal cords – they are merely a set of recognisable stylistic features (associated with a recognisable point of view) consistently displayed by a fictional entity. As modern readers, we have learned to expect such consistency and distinctiveness in the way that characters 'speak'. We have also learned to expect written texts to construct a narrator taking responsibility for the narrative and speaking with their own 'voice'. The more attuned modern writers and readers have become to the differences between narrator, author and implied author, the more writers have become tempted to use those differences and play with them, thus giving them even more substance in more recent texts.

Such expectations and conventions are foreign to early medieval literature. There, the performer of a poem (be it recited, composed orally or simply read) is still expected to lend their real voice to the text and take responsibility for it. That responsibility is rather limited or diluted, however. The performer is merely one link in a much greater chain of transmission and reception, and the same goes for the poet. The notion that an individual could be entirely responsible for a story seems to have been foreign too, and the 'voice' of the narrator reflects that belief. Not only is it stylistically homogenous with

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the voices of the characters, but its origin tends to fluctuate, as if the poet was uncertain whether the narrative had to be taken responsibility for by someone and whether that someone could be a mere individual.

A Problem with Point of View

Voice and point of view are very closely connected. A textual 'voice' is given identity because its form – i.e. its style – is both distinctive and consistent, but also because it conveys a point of view that is itself distinctive and consistent. As such it is not surprising that point of view in Old English poetry presents many of the problems already noticed for voices.¹ Though the two issues are similar and interconnected, it is useful, for the sake of clarity and precision, to examine them separately. Even more than the trouble with voices, the trouble with point of view in Old English poetry has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of the corpus.

Readers of modern and postmodern texts tend to judge characters not so much based on what the narrator says about them – we are now used to the idea that narrators are not always to be trusted – but based on what the characters do and even more on what they say. Undeniably, in such texts, implicit characterisation is both a very subtle and very powerful tool. When it comes to Old English poetry, however, opinions are somewhat divided: as mentioned in the introduction to this book,² several critics have argued that Direct Speech in Old English poetry does not serve characterisation, but others have rejected that notion, in part because they felt it implied some sort of deficiency on the part of the Old English corpus.

This chapter aims to prove that Old English poetic speeches cannot allow implicit characterisation of the type expected by present-day readers and to explain why by pointing out the crucial differences between the handling of point of view in Old English narrative poetry and in (post)modern literature.

¹ Some of the peculiarities of point of view in Old English poetry have already been noted by others: Huisman ('Subjectivity / Orality', pp. 236–7) and Mize (*Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 16) both note that point of view in Old English poems tends to be unstable, shifting from one focaliser to another, but they have not explored the full implications of that instability.

² See Introduction, 'Traditional Views on Direct Speech' (pp. 2–5).

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Modern Views on Point of View

The theoretical study of point of view in narratives is closely linked to the rise of the realistic novel in the nineteenth century. One of the first writers to offer an in-depth reflection on the issue is in fact a novelist himself – Henry James. In the prefaces to several of his works, he points out the necessity of representing the action of the novel through the prism of a singular consciousness:

The great chroniclers ... have at least always either placed a mind of some sort – in the sense of a reflecting or colouring medium – in possession of the general adventure ... or else paid signally, as to the interest created, for their failure to do so.³

From that perspective, any inconsistency is a grave mistake, betraying the author's incompetence, hence James's contrition in the face of such a mistake in his own work:

Here indeed is a lapse from artistic dignity, a confession of want of resource, which I may not pretend to explain to-day, and on behalf of which I have nothing to urge save a consciousness of my dereliction presumably too vague at the time ... I might of course have adopted another plan – the artist is free, surely, to adopt any he fancies, provided it be a plan and he adopt it intelligently ... whereas the beauty of a thing of this order really done as a whole is ever, certainly, that its parts are in abject dependence, and that even any great charm they may individually and capriciously put forth is infirm so far as it doesn't measurably contribute to a harmony.⁴

Since James's time, narratological studies have grown richer and more complex. One of the most influential theorists is probably Genette,⁵ who, among other things, introduced the notion of focalisation and established a clear distinction between the functions of focaliser (through whose point of view the scene is observed) and narrator (who is telling the story).⁶

More recently, Nünning has significantly contributed to the field

³ Extract from James's preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, published in *Theory of Fiction*, ed. Miller, p. 239.

⁴ Extract from James's preface to *The Spoils of Poynton*, published in *Theory of Fiction*, ed. Miller, p. 244. The 'lapse' concerns a passage from *A London Life*, in which James represents a scene that Laura Wing has not witnessed even though the character is otherwise the narrative's focaliser.

⁵ Genette, *Figures III*, partially translated in his *Narrative Discourse*. For re-evaluations of Genette's work, see for instance Fludernik, 'New Wine in Old Bottles? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing'; Rabatel, *La construction textuelle du point de vue*.

⁶ One should not confuse the focaliser (through whose point of view the scene is observed) and the focalised object or subject (what is being observed). The word focalisation can be ambiguous as it encompasses both.

by focusing on how several characters' points of view can be orchestrated within a narrative. He builds on Pfister's work to describe how characters' points of view are constructed:

A character-perspective can be defined as a fictional agent's subjective worldview. According to Pfister,⁷ the perspective from which a character observes the world is defined by three factors: by 'the level of advance information the figure has access to,' by the 'psychological disposition,' and by the 'ideological orientation' ... of the character ... each verbal utterance and each physical or mental act of a character provides insight into his or her perspective.⁸

This definition clarifies a number of points that are often only implicit in other theoretical works. The way in which modern narratology envisages the character's point of view presupposes the fact that the character is endowed with a certain amount of knowledge and with consistent psychological and ideological features, and that every act and every word of the character reflect that consistency.

This conception of the character as an entity endowed with emotional and cognitive abilities comparable to that of an actual person depends on a mimetic (in the narrowest sense of the term) conception of literature, exemplified for instance in the principle of minimal departure outlined by Ryan:

This law ... states that we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [the actual world]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text.⁹

For Nünning, the overall perspective structure of a given text depends on which individual points of view are selected and how they are orchestrated: is there a hierarchy? Is there a dominant and unifying narratorial point of view? Are the various points of view similar or sharply contrasted?¹⁰ In any case, the fact that a character has its own specific point of view is considered to be a given.

Such general principles can of course be infringed. At the same time that narratology developed, literary authors (often well acquainted with the theories themselves) began to experiment ever more boldly with the rules. A good example of such experimentation with point of view in postmodern literature is found in Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled*. In

⁷ Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, p. 58.

⁸ Nünning, 'On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts', p. 210.

⁹ Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*, p. 51, quoted by Nünning, 'On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts', pp. 210–11.

¹⁰ Nünning, 'On the Perspective Structure of Narrative Texts', pp. 215–17.

this novel, the perspective is extremely unstable and thus very destabilising for the reader. In the following passage, for instance, Ishiguro deliberately plays with the point of view of the character, threatening its credibility:

Stephan got out of the car and *I watched* him go up the entrance.

... The door was opened by an elderly, silver-haired woman. She *looked* slender and frail, but there was a certain gracefulness in her movement as she smiled and showed Stephan in. The door closed behind him, *but by leaning right back in my seat I found I could still see* the two of them clearly illuminated in the narrow pane to the side of the front door. Stephan was wiping his feet on the doormat, saying:

'I'm sorry to come like this at such short notice.' ... He indicated in our direction, but the elderly woman was already opening the door into her apartment.

I watched her lead Stephan through a small and tidy front parlour, through a second doorway and down a shadowy corridor decorated on either side with little framed water-colours. The corridor ended at Miss Collins's drawing-room – a large-L-shaped affair at the back of the building. [my italics]¹¹

The author has chosen a subjective point of view, with the main protagonist acting both as narrator and focaliser. Theoretically, the point of view of the character should be limited by the fact that he is sitting at the back of a car stationed in front of the building where the action takes place. In actual fact, this theoretical limit is constantly under threat until it is altogether dismissed. After insisting on the focalising role of the character (see the items in italics), the author gradually introduces elements that contradict that focalisation: at first, the character can only see the scene, but then, even though the characters are already going inside and barely in view, their words become audible too. When the two characters go further into the building, we would expect to lose sight of them, but instead the narrative follows them inside the building. This development is all the more jarring as the repetition of 'I watched' seems to suggest that the point of view is still the same.

Ishiguro is deliberately playing with the rules of perspective here and the effect is extremely destabilising for a reader used to the respect of such rules. This destabilising effect mirrors the situation of the character, who, in the novel, stumbles from one appointment to another without ever feeling in control of his day. The novel reads somewhat like a dream, sometimes pleasant and sometimes nerve-racking, but always elusive. Of course, this effect on the reader can only be achieved if they know (from theoretical learning or from experience) the rules

¹¹ Ishiguro, *The Unconsoled*, pp. 56–7.

that normally apply to perspective in novels. In *The Unconsoled*, the rules are ruthlessly challenged, but they are still indispensable to our understanding of the text.

It seems that, in modern and postmodern literature, there are only two cases where perspective inconsistency can occur: either the author is making a grave mistake or they are deliberately – and thus meaningfully – infringing the rules. There is much reason to think that such is not the case in early medieval literature and particularly in Old English poetry. First, in modern and postmodern literature the author's intention is central to the (post)modern conception, whereas the status of the author is extremely problematic in Old English poems, where authors are often anonymous and where the collective tradition plays a huge role. Second, the examples of inconsistencies in Old English poetry are so numerous that it seems unreasonable to treat them as exceptions to a well-established rule.

To better understand the use of point of view in Old English poetry – and the role of Direct Speech in constructing the points of view of the characters – this chapter examines three types of infringement corresponding to the three features of characters' perspective outlined by Pfister and Nünning: ideological orientation, psychological disposition and level of information available.

Antagonists Sharing the Same View

Present-day readers tend – understandably – to expect antagonists to hold different views of the world, especially when the antagonism is as extreme as it usually is in hagiography, and they also expect that difference to be perceptible in the speeches of the antagonists. When it comes to Old English narrative poetry, however, such expectations are often disappointed. Not only do soldiers of Christ and their enemies speak the same language,¹² but they also largely share the same view of the world, in spite of some surface differences. Typically, this paradox is solved by the poets in one of two ways. Either the opponent is ill-informed and will therefore accept the dominant view as soon as they gain more information, or they are being deliberately deceitful, which implies that they actually know that the Christian view is the true one. In both cases, the point of view of the opponent is thus without substance. It is not an alternative – merely an easily dissipated illusion.

A good example of the first case can be found in the assembly of wise men in *Elene*. They are represented as entirely ignorant of Christ's death before Judas's tale:

¹² See Chapter 5, 'Christian Words in Pagan Mouths' (pp. 182–7).

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Qui cum irent dicebant intra se, pro qua causa putas hunc laborem facit nobis Regina. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 5)¹³

Eodon þa fram rune, swa him sio rice cwen,
bald in burgum, beboden hæfde,
geomormode, georne smeadon,
sohton searopancum, hwæt sio syn wære
þe hie on þam folce gefremed hæfdon
wið þam casere, þe him sio cwen wite. (*Elene*, 411–16)¹⁴

Even after Judas has told the story, they claim they have never heard of such a thing:

Nos talia numquam audivimus, qualia a te hodie dicta sunt. Si ergo inquisitio facta fuerit de hoc, vide ne ostendas. Manifeste autem qui hæc dicis & locum nosti. (*Inventio sanctae crucis*, § 7)¹⁵

Næfre we hyrdon hæleð ænigne
on þysse þeode, butan þec nu ða,
þegn oðerne þyslic cyðan
ymb swa dygle wyrd. Do swa þe þynce,
fyrngidda frod, gif ðu frugnen sie
on wera corðre. Wisdomes beðearf,
worda wærlīcra ond witan snyttro,
se ðære æðelan sceal ondwyrd agifan
for þyslicne þreat on meþle. (*Elene*, 538–46)¹⁶

For the most part, the Latin and Old English texts are very close. However, Cynewulf lays greater emphasis on certain key points, thus slightly altering the characterisation of the wise men. After their meeting with Elene, they are represented as both more dispirited (*geomormode*) and more determined to find out the truth (*georne*) than in the Latin text. After Judas has told his tale, they claim (in Old English as in Latin) that they have never heard of such a thing, but in the Old English version they also adopt a humble attitude, contrasting their own ignorance with the great wisdom required to know such things

¹³ 'They, as they were going, were saying to each other: "why do you think the Queen is causing us this trouble?"'

¹⁴ 'Then they left the council, as the powerful queen, bold in her cities, had ordered them. Their minds sad, they deliberated earnestly, tried to find out with cunning thoughts what was the sin that they had committed in that nation against the empire and which the queen accused them of.'

¹⁵ 'We have never heard of such things as those told by you today. Thus if an investigation is carried out about this, be careful not to reveal anything. Indeed, from what you say it is obvious that you know the place.'

¹⁶ 'Never have we heard any man from this nation, except you now, another thane reveal thus such a secret fate. Act as you think, wise in old prophecies, if you are questioned in front of the multitude. He will need wisdom, prudent words and the intelligence of a wise man, he who shall give an answer to the noblewoman in front of such a great assembled crowd.'

and to be able to answer the empress's questions. This attitude has no equivalent in the Latin text, where the wise men seem convinced that Judas knows more than what he is saying, but show no desire to find more about it themselves and do not hesitate to advise silence and dissimulation.

In neither text are the Jewish men represented as a group of people convinced that Jesus was an impostor who was legitimately executed for his crimes. They rather appear to have been deprived of the 'good news' by their ancestors who seem to have withheld crucial information from them. Still, the wise men of the Latin text are not very cooperative. By contrast, those represented by Cynewulf seem to suffer from their lack of knowledge and to be keen to remedy it.

This mode of representation has several functions. First, it makes the abstract structure of the narrative stand out more clearly. The ignorance of the Jewish assembly is comparable to that of the wise men consulted by Constantine at the beginning of the poem (153–68). In this way, the text does not represent a series of distinct events, but rather a repetition of the same pattern, much like a ritual. On the one hand are shown people who, in spite of all their wisdom, are deprived of the knowledge of essential truths, and on the other hand stands the Church Militant fighting to make them see the light.¹⁷ The contrast between blindness and light is supplemented by another contrast between sadness and joy, which permeates the whole poem and encourages an eschatological interpretation: the sadness of the unconverted crowds (e.g. *geomormode*, 413a above) suggests the pain of the damned in hell whereas the joy of the converts parallels that of the saved souls.¹⁸

Second, this representation allows the poet to disqualify Judaism as a religion.¹⁹ Indeed, it is not represented as a competing faith and world view but as a lack, a deprivation of light that only conversion can cure. This conception explains why it is always so easy for crowds to convert in hagiographic poetry (in *Elene*, but also in *Juliana* and *Andreas*). In that sense, they are very much like blank slates waiting to be written on. In such texts, the representation of diverging points of view as the mere product of error or lack of information is obviously ideologically loaded. However, the same pattern can also be observed

¹⁷ See Calder, *Cynewulf*, pp. 105–37; Stepsis and Rand, 'Contrast and Conversion in Cynewulf's *Elene*'.

¹⁸ See Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, pp. 234–6.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that the Jewish people themselves are represented rather positively. They are shown as the chosen people, who received the Old Testament, but that positive perception is dependent on their future acceptance of the Christian Faith. On that ambiguous status of the Jewish people in the poem, see in particular Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*'.

elsewhere, for instance in the disagreement between Beowulf and Unferth in the famous flyting scene (499–606).²⁰

Clover interprets the scene differently:

What is remarkable about Beowulf's reply, after all, is that it concedes the issue ... The disagreement lies not in the facts, which are mutually acknowledged, but in their interpretation²¹

For Clover, the opposition lies between a negative interpretation of the facts (Beowulf acted rashly and presumptuously) and a positive one (Beowulf acted like a brave hero). This is not entirely exact. It is true that Beowulf and Unferth agree on the basic facts: Beowulf and Breca challenged each other at sea in dangerous circumstances. However, Beowulf's reply is more than just another take on the same events. It supplies additional information: on the youth of the protagonists, which is a sort of extenuating circumstance, but also and most importantly on Beowulf's performance. Beowulf denies failing against Breca. On the contrary, he claims that he accomplished a feat of bravery greater than any performed by Breca or Unferth (581b–589). It is precisely this information that is decisive. If Beowulf had proved inferior to Breca, his daring would have been vain presumption; as he proved he was the stronger of the two, his daring becomes praiseworthy. In other words, what matters is not how the challenge is perceived but whether, after all, the hero proved to be up to the task or not. In fact, this is the whole point of Unferth's provocation: to find out whether Beowulf is up to the task of confronting Grendel.

Typically, then, conflicts of opinion in Old English narrative poetry do not pit against each other two diverging points of view on the same object, but one person who knows and one who does not. In the secular poem *Beowulf*, the one who knows is the actor and direct witness of the events (by opposition with the mere second-hand account that Unferth has access to);²² in hagiographic poetry, the one who knows is the one who has been baptised and has access to revealed truth. In both cases, there is only one truth and thus only one correct point of view. The difficulty lies in uncovering that truth. There is a form of epistemological optimism in that: truth is conceived of as an object exterior to human thought (and not as a construction of human discourse), which can be accessed provided enough information is gathered.

That pattern knows one common variant, which does not undermine its basic structure – when the one who is wrong deliberately persists in error, out of pure viciousness. This variant is only found in religious texts, where diabolical influence can account for such obstinacy. In the

²⁰ On that scene, see also Chapter 1, 'Structure of Exchanges' (pp. 31–4).

²¹ Clover, 'The Germanic Context of the Unferþ Episode', p. 462.

²² On the importance of eyewitnesses in Old English culture, see Chapter 2, n. 106.

corpus considered here, the most striking example is to be found in this passage from *Andreas*:

Videntes enim nos principes sacerdotum, sequentes ipsum dominum nostrum iesum christum, magistrum et deum nostrum uno ore clamantes et dicentes nobis (*recensio casanatensis*, § 12)²³

Huscworde ongan
þurh inwitðanc ealdorsacerd
herme hyspan, hordlocan onspeon,
wroht webbade. He on gewitte oncneow
þæt we soðfæstes swaðe folgodon,
læston larcwide. (*Andreas*, 669b–675a)²⁴

Just after this introduction, the high priest claims that the apostles are to be pitied and that they have abandoned their home for a miserable life of exile. In the Old English poem (which diverges from the source here), this alternative point of view is disqualified by the narrator (who is *Andreas* himself in this passage) before it can even be expressed. According to *Andreas*,²⁵ the high priest knows himself that the apostles are on the side of truth and it is out of pure maliciousness that he pretends otherwise.

It is relatively rare for the text to make it so explicit that the character knows the truth and is denying it intentionally. However, it is common for the poet to leave clues that the character's blindness is inspired by the devil – that there is something furious and even perverse about it. In *Andreas* and *Juliana*, an actual demon is represented goading the crowds to such excesses and, even before the demon appears in person, its influence is sometimes perceptible. Thus, *Juliana's* father and her suitor are often shown to be under the influence of some sort of manic rage and obstinacy, as in this passage, which is considerably richer in Old English than in Latin:

Audiens hæc præfectus, uocauit patrem eius (*Passio Iulianae*, § 2)²⁶

Ða se æþeling wearð yrre gebolgen,
firendædum fah, gehyrde þære fæmnan word,

²³ 'Indeed when the leaders of the priests saw us following our lord Jesus Christ himself, praising our God and master with a single voice, they told us'. The corresponding passage in Greek is even more concise and neutral: Boenig translates it as 'the high priest saw us following Jesus and said to us' (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 8).

²⁴ 'Out of malicious purpose, the high priest started to mock us insultingly with scornful speech; he opened his stock of thoughts and fabricated a false accusation. He knew in his mind that we were following the steps of the one who holds the truth, that we were carrying out his teaching.'

²⁵ The fact that *Andreas*, in his role as a narrator, claims to have knowledge of the priest's inner thoughts is itself an interesting case of inconsistency. For an analysis of similar cases, see below 'Inconsistencies Regarding How Much the Characters Know'.

²⁶ 'Hearing this, the prefect called her father'.

het ða gefetigan ferend snelle,
hreoþ ond hygeblind, haligre fæder,
recene to rune. (*Juliana*, 58–62a)²⁷

The reference to Eleusius's sins is not coincidental. It shows that the cause of his blindness is diabolical. The process is described in detail by the demon itself later on (397b–417a): first, the devil perverts the mind of the person by making them sin and, once perverted, that mind is defenceless against the most abject thoughts.²⁸

In conclusion, it seems that even when the poem represents a violent opposition between two factions, only one point of view is truly expressed.²⁹ The point of view of the opponent always seems without substance. At best, it is represented as a lack waiting to be filled; at worst, it is perverse and deliberate blindness. In both cases, the alternative point of view has no true existence. It is only the absence or the denial of the only point of view expressed. In that, Old English poetry differs significantly from more modern texts, particularly novels, where it is common for several competing visions of the world to be expressed.

One might be tempted to agree with Bakhtin and see in this phenomenon the sign of a form of dogmaticism. However, such a view would probably be misleading. If dogmaticism was the key, then ideologically divergent points of view would be suppressed, but there would be no reason not to represent points of view that differ in other respects: for instance in psychological disposition or in access to information. In fact, in Old English poetry, ideology is only one part of the equation – the other dimensions of the characters' points of view are problematic too.

²⁷ 'Then, the nobleman grew furious with anger, stained with sins, he heard the young woman's words and, fierce and his thoughts blinded, ordered fast messengers to fetch the saint's father quickly so they could talk.'

²⁸ On this passage and on the devil's *modus operandi*, which reflects Gregory the Great's teachings on sin, see in particular Doubleday, 'The Allegory of the Soul as Fortress in Old English Poetry'; Bzdyl, '*Juliana*: Cynewulf's Dispeller of Delusion'; Hermann, *Allegories of War*, pp. 45–6 and 158–9; and Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, pp. 27–32.

²⁹ Klein argues that, in *Elene*, each character has a different point of view on the Cross: 'For Constantine, the meaning of the Cross inheres in its potential to ensure swift victory against the seemingly endless hosts of Huns and Goths who threaten his homeland; for the nameless Christian converts in the poem, the meaning of the Cross lies in its ability to resurrect the dead; for Cynewulf, the meaning of the Cross emerges from its power to unlock creative energy and allow him to produce poetry' ('Reading Queenship in Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 55). However, it seems there is some confusion. What Klein describes as different (and potentially conflicting) points of view are in fact different functions of the Cross in different occasions and for different people.

A Problem with Point of View
Psychological Inconsistencies

In Bzdyl's dissertation on prayer in Old English narratives he notes an interesting paradox: it is not uncommon for saints to praise their own virtue in their prayers, thus displaying a kind of boastfulness that seems hardly compatible with the qualities one might expect from a saint. For Bzdyl, such comments should not be interpreted as an implicit criticism of the characters, but must on the contrary be taken as literally true:

In using the speech of a character to make an explicit authorial comment on the story, the narrator was able to insure that the audience understood the story correctly ... When characters speak of their own sinlessness in their prayers, they may not be giving examples of pride – they may be merely stating a fact that the author wished to present.³⁰

Bzdyl notes the case of a prayer spoken by Andreas (1401–28), from which the following extract is taken:

recordare domine magister bone, tunc quando in cruce fuisti clamabas
ad patrem, deus deus meus quare me dereliquisti? Ego autem servus
tuus, tres dies sunt hodie trahentes me, per omnes plateas, et vicos huius
civitatis (*recensio casanatensis*, § 28)³¹

Hwæt, ðu sigora weard,
dryhten hælend, on dæges tide
mid Iudeum geomor wurde
ða ðu of gealgan, god lifigende,
fyrnweorca frea, to fæder cleopodest,
cininga wuldor, ond cwæde ðus:
'Ic ðe, fæder engla, frignan wille,
lifes leohtfruma, hwæt forlætest ðu me?'
Ond ic nu þry dagas þolian sceolde
wælgrim witu. Bidde ic, weoroda god,
þæt ic gast minne agifan mote,
sawla symbelgifa, on þines sylfes hand. (*Andreas*, 1406b–1415a)³²

³⁰ Bzdyl, 'Prayer in Old English Narratives', p. 128 (see also the previous pages, from p. 123 onwards).

³¹ 'Remember, good master and lord, when you were on the Cross and called to your father: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And I, your servant, have been dragged through all the streets and districts of the city for three days today'. Boenig's translation of the corresponding passage in Greek: 'For behold I have been torn to pieces for three days. But remember, Lord, that you were three hours upon the Cross and cried out to the Father, "My father, why have you forsaken me?"' (*The Acts of Andrew*, p. 19).

³² 'Why! You, guardian of victories, lord saviour, had experienced sadness for a day among the Jews when on the gallows, living God, lord of the creation, you called to your father, glory of kings, and said thus: "I want, father of angels, to ask you, origin of light and life, why have you forsaken me?" And now I have endured terrible torment for three days.'

If we were to read this passage as we would a modern novel, interpreting the words spoken by the character as the expression of their individual point of view, it would be hard to shake the notion that Andreas is committing blasphemy of staggering proportions. Not only is Andreas deliberately comparing himself with Christ on the Cross, reusing the same words,³³ but he actually suggests that his suffering is greater and that he endured it for longer than Christ, who begged for help after only one day instead of three. Such an attitude is in direct contradiction with the example set by Peter who, according to the legend, requested to be crucified head down precisely because he did not deserve the honour of dying in the same way as Jesus.³⁴

Conversely, if the comparison is not seen as the expression of the character's individual view, but as a reflection of the point of view expressed by the text as a whole, then it appears much more appropriate. The motif of the imitation of Christ is an essential ingredient of the hagiographical genre and it is quite common for a hagiographer to stress the similarities between a saint's life and Christ's (when they do not invent them altogether), to facilitate typological interpretation.³⁵ Seen in this light, the comparison of Andreas to Christ is perfectly standard and has many analogues in Christian literature, including in Old English poetry.³⁶

The question, then, is this: when a character is speaking, and particularly when they are saying things about themselves, should we interpret their words as the expression of their own individual emotions and perceptions, or should we interpret them as part and parcel of the message conveyed by the poem as a whole, undifferentiated from the words spoken by the narrator?

In the example from *Andreas* quoted above, clearly the audience is meant to understand that Andreas *is* like Christ and not that Andreas is personally claiming that he is like Christ. In that sense, Andreas's words are not consistent with what he, as a humble and devoted Christian, might say, but with what the poet is trying to convey. Having

I beg you, God of armies, to allow me, you who invites souls to the feast, to give up my soul into your own hand.'

³³ The parallel is already very strong in the Greek and Latin texts, and it is reinforced in the Old English poem: *on þines sylfes hand* echoes the Gospel according to Luke: *et clamans voce magna Iesus ait Pater in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum et haec dicens expiravit* (Luke XXIII.46, 'calling out with a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, I commend my spirit to your hands," and saying that he expired').

³⁴ See for instance the *Passio sanctorum Petri et Pauli*, by pseudo-Marcellus (edited by Lipsius and Bonnet).

³⁵ On this topic, see for instance Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, pp. 17–18.

³⁶ In *Guthlac A*, for instance, several elements are designed to suggest a parallel with Christ: the theme of the temptation in the desert, of course, but also, more particularly, the idea of the devil taking the protagonist to a high place to contemplate the earth (Matt. IV.8 and Luke IV.5).

such words presented through Direct Speech rather than through narrative allows for a more dramatic representation, but it does not alter the truth status of the words spoken.

This is not to say that the words expressed by characters in Old English poetry are never consistent with their presumed psychological disposition or that the statements presented through Direct Speech are always meant to be taken as being as equally reliable as those of the narrator.

Straightforward personal emotions, reflecting the particular disposition of the character, are frequently conveyed through Direct Speech in Old English narrative poetry. Admittedly, Anglo-Saxon poets do not seem overly concerned with representing complex psychological nuances for their characters, but they do make them speak words of grief or distress when their situations give them reasons to feel aggrieved or distressed. One may think for instance of Cain and Hagar lamenting their fates; Juliana, Matthew and Judith begging for heavenly help; or Adam and Wiglaf berating their addressees for their perceived failures.³⁷

Such examples are not entirely decisive, however, because what those characters say is consistent with how they are meant to feel, but it is also consistent with what the narrator is trying to convey. Thus, when Sarah says 'I am unhappy' (*Genesis A*, 2226b: *Ic eom geomorfrød*), the audience is meant to understand 'the poem is telling me that Sarah is unhappy' in exactly the same way that when Andreas suggests 'I am like Christ' the audience is meant to understand 'the poem is telling me that Andreas is like Christ' (and not 'the poem is telling me that Andreas personally thinks he is like Christ'). Whether the point of view expressed is that of the character or the narrator does not make any difference regarding Sarah's alleged sadness, whereas it does regarding Andreas's humility (or lack thereof).

This is why examples involving pride or humility are both extremely interesting and very hard to interpret. In a realistic aesthetic, it is possible for an unhappy character to say 'I am unhappy', but it is not possible for a truly humble character to say 'I am humble' or to praise their own virtue in any way. Therefore, such instances are very good tests to find out whether character point of view is treated realistically (i.e. as reflecting the point of view of the character only) or not.

The evidence from the corpus is not entirely clear-cut. There are instances when characters say good things about themselves and the audience is clearly meant to understand that what they say is the product of their own delusion and not the actual truth. It is clearly the case when Satan claims he can be a god too (*Genesis B*, 278–91) or

³⁷ Respectively *Genesis A* (1023–35 and 2274–9), *Juliana* (272–82a), *Andreas* (63–87), *Judith* (83–94a), *Genesis B* (791–820) and *Beowulf* (2864–91).

when Nebuchadnezzar celebrates his own 'large might' ('*rume rice*', *Daniel*, 610a) for instance. However, in such cases, the characters are unambiguously represented as villains and the narrator takes great care to anticipate the speech with a fairly long presentation of the speaker as presumptuous and wrong-headed (*Genesis B*, 262–77 ; *Daniel*, 598–607).

Overall, the evidence seems to suggest that, unless stated otherwise explicitly by the narrator, the words spoken by the characters should be taken as reliable accounts of who they are and how they feel, with the same truth value as any description provided by the narrator, and not as partial accounts reflecting only their own individual take on the situation. As such, one should probably not ascribe a fault to a character based on what they say unless the fault is confirmed by the narrator.

Inconsistencies Regarding How Much the Characters Know

Occasionally, the words spoken by a character relate to information that is not supposed to be available to that character or should make no sense to the addressee based on what the addressee is supposed to know. Both Campbell and Regan note the fact that Elene, when she speaks to Judas (663–6), seems to be aware of what he has just said to the other wise men, even though she was not present during that scene. Both interpret that surprising fact as one of the miraculous events occurring in the narrative.³⁸

It is true that several miracles are recounted in the poem and that extralucidity is hardly beyond the range of saintly powers. However, the other miracles – the apparition of smoke showing the location of the Cross and the resurrection of a young man – are explicitly presented as miracles and praised as such. If Elene's strange perspicacity was meant to be seen as a miracle, surely the poem would make more of it. Furthermore, there are other comparable cases in the rest of the Old English corpus and some of them do not lend themselves very well to a miraculous interpretation.

Beowulf's account of Freawaru's ill-fated marriage is a notorious example (2032–66). Many critics have noted how incongruous it was for Beowulf to say so much about something that has yet to happen, going so far as to represent the words of one of the protagonists through Direct Speech. That incongruousness has been interpreted in various ways, but almost always within the scope of a narrow mimetic interpretation of point of view.

³⁸ Campbell, 'Cynewulf's Multiple Revelations', p. 238; and Regan, 'Evangelicism as the Informing Principle of Cynewulf's *Elene*', p. 264.

For some, the digression is so detailed that it can only make sense if we consider that the events have already taken place and that the use of the present tense is to be understood as a form of narrative present and not as a reference to the future.³⁹ Others contend that the passage obviously refers to future events and thus that the character must have either some gift of prescience or very strong deductive skills allowing him to guess the probable outcome.⁴⁰ Lawrence seems to be the only one who defends the idea that the poet is deliberately eschewing realism to serve other aesthetic purposes.⁴¹ In other words, the information is provided through Beowulf's mouth because it is more striking that way and because Beowulf's mention of Freawaru provides a good opportunity to include the tale in the poem, not because Beowulf is realistically expected to have access to such information. Lawrence's interpretation has received little support and yet it is the most probable. It is certainly the only one that can account for both the anomalies found in *Elene* and *Beowulf* (unless one is willing to accept that Anglo-Saxons thought prescience was a very ordinary ability not worth commenting upon, which seems rather unlikely).

It is not just the knowledge supposedly mastered by the speaker that poets handle rather freely. Very similar anomalies occur with respect to the knowledge supposedly available to the addressee. A good example is provided by the demon's first speech to Eve in *Genesis B*:

'Ic wat, inc waldend god
abolgen wyrð, swa ic him þisne bodscipe
selfa secge, þonne ic of þys siðe cume
ofer langne weg, þæt git ne læstan wel
hwilc ærende swa he easten hider
on þysne sið sendeð. (*Genesis B*, 551b–556a)⁴²

For the audience, who know all about the confrontation between Adam and the demon, that speech is crystal clear. But for Eve, who was apparently not present during the conversation,⁴³ it should be incomprehensible. In spite of that, nothing in the text suggests that

³⁹ That hypothesis is defended by Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning*, vol. 1, p. 16 and vol. 2, p. 38, as well as Malone, 'Time and Place in the Ingeld Episode of *Beowulf*'.

⁴⁰ See in particular Chambers, *Beowulf: An Introduction*, p. 21; Huppé, 'A Reconsideration of the Ingeld Passage in *Beowulf*'; Bonjour, 'The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*'; and Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, pp. 158–61, as well as, more recently but rather briefly, Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, pp. 243–4.

⁴¹ Lawrence, *Beowulf and Epic Tradition*, p. 80.

⁴² 'I know that the ruling God will be angry against you two as I tell him this message myself, when I come back from this distant expedition, that you two do not conform well to the instruction that he sent from the east on this occasion.'

⁴³ The poet explains that the demon turned to 'where he saw the woman, Eve, stand on the earthly kingdom' (*þær he þæt wif geseah / on eorðrice Euan stondan*, 547b–548), which suggests that she was not already present on the scene of the demon's confrontation with Adam.

Eve is in any way surprised or puzzled and the demon makes no effort to clarify the situation. Similarly, Hill notes that, in *Elene*, the empress addresses the assembly of Jewish wise men as if they knew everything about Christian faith, which is presumably not the case (on the other hand, the audience of the poem *do* know about such things and thus do not require explanations).⁴⁴ Such oddities strongly suggest that the amount of information present in Direct Speech is not primarily tailored to fit what the speaker and addressee(s) are meant to know, but rather with a view to what the audience already know.

Again, as with psychological disposition, this is not to say that the information provided in speeches never fits what the characters are supposed to know. On the contrary, there are instances where there is a discrepancy between what the audience know and what the character knows and where the ignorance of the character plays a significant role in the narrative. It is the case, for instance, when Juliana and Eve encounter a demon masquerading as a messenger from God (*Juliana*, 272–82a; *Genesis B*, 655–83) or when Andreas and his disciples do not realise that Jesus is steering the ship on which they embark (*Andreas*, 256–817). In those scenes, the speeches of the character reflect their ignorance.

As such, it cannot be argued that, with regard to information, the point of view of the characters is wholly undifferentiated from that of the narrator. If it suits the purpose of the narrative, differentiation can be introduced. However, it is clear that poets do not feel that such differentiation is crucial at all times. If the ignorance of a character does not play a significant role in the narrative, then it seems that poets will rather have their characters speak as if they knew as much as the audience rather than burden the interaction with information that the audience do not need, simply for the sake of realism.

Whether one considers ideological orientation, psychological disposition or access to information, the diagnosis is the same: Anglo-Saxon poets operate no systematic differentiation between the point of view of each character and the point of view of the narrator. Of the three aspects considered, the most undifferentiated one is probably ideology: characters may represent different factions, but they are never really allowed to defend an opinion at odds with the dominant one. In a sense though, this may not be the most radical rejection of realism.

People who are firmly entrenched in their own worldview may have difficulties in realising that other people may see the world very differently (and as a consequence they may be tempted, if they write narratives, even realistic ones, to represent characters who all share more or less that very same worldview). However, even the most

⁴⁴ Hill, 'Sapiential Structure and Figural Narrative in the Old English *Elene*', pp. 212–13.

narrow-minded people will be aware that different persons have different personalities and have access to different information – and that the way they talk must reflect that to some extent. When such basic facts are ignored, or only taken into account when convenient, it seems extremely unlikely that the poet is genuinely trying (and in that case failing) to represent realistic points of view.

A more reasonable interpretation is that the poet is not trying to represent realistic points of view at all. To a lesser or greater extent, every narrative requires some suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. From one narrative tradition to another, however, what is considered acceptable varies, sometimes considerably. Early twentieth-century audiences, for instance, were used to accept stories where voices could not be heard and where everything appeared in black and white. From the extant Old English narrative poetic corpus, it seems that Anglo-Saxon audiences were used to accept the fact that what characters say must be useful to the story in some way but that it does not necessarily represent the individual point of view of the character as such.

What Consequences for Interpretation?

When several conflicting images are given of the same object, correct interpretation will depend on the structuration of point of view displayed by the text. In a (post)modern text, where the narrative is usually displayed through multiple, carefully orchestrated points of view, conflicting information can usually be explained as the product of those different points of view on the same object. When even that cannot explain away the inconsistencies, the implication is usually that the author is deliberately trying to destabilise the reader and to draw their attention to the difficulties and even the impossibility of interpretation. If neither hypothesis seems likely, then the reader is warranted to suspect a 'lapse from artistic dignity',⁴⁵ i.e. a plain mistake on the part of the author.

When a present-day audience is faced with conflicting representations of the same object in Old English poetry, they are naturally tempted to interpret the text in one of those three ways (differentiated points of view, deliberate intention to destabilise or a plain mistake). However, such interpretations are likely anachronistic.

An interesting example of conflicting representations is provided in *Beowulf*, regarding the Geats's opinion on Beowulf's expedition. When Beowulf first arrives at Hrothgar's court, he claims that he has been

⁴⁵ The quotation is from James. See above, 'Modern Views on Point of View'.

advised by his compatriots – the best and the wisest – to undertake this mission (409–26a), which echoes an earlier, similar comment by the narrator (202–3). However, when Beowulf comes back home, Hygelac asserts that he had tried to advise him against it (1992–7a).

The critics who have noted the discrepancy have usually attempted to account for it in modern ways, therefore facing a dilemma: either the discrepancy is a mistake (the result perhaps of conflicting sources that the poet neglected to harmonise),⁴⁶ which reflects badly on the most celebrated poem of the Old English corpus, or it is actually the product of two different points of view, in which case one must prove that Hygelac is not one of the wise men mentioned by Beowulf at the beginning of the poem and that he does not share their point of view.⁴⁷

Bammesberger and Orchard have chosen the latter option. Bammesberger argues that Hygelac cannot be expected to have been one of the ‘wise men’ (*snotere ceorlas*) who were there when Beowulf returned from his fight against sea-monsters (419–22) and therefore cannot be one of those who advised him to go.⁴⁸ As for Orchard, he goes as far as suggesting that the poet must be implying not only that Hygelac is not one of those wise men, but that he is not a wise man at all.⁴⁹

Such interpretations are problematic, however, even if one accepts the notion that Old English poems may represent differentiated points of view (which is doubtful, as demonstrated above). First of all, it seems unlikely that Hygelac is not meant to be included in the phrase *leode mine* (‘my people’, 415b), which immediately precedes the phrase *þa selestan, snotere ceorlas* (‘the best of them, wise men’, 416). Bammesberger’s suggestion that *leode mine* is a vocative addressed to Beowulf’s companions present in the room is rather unconvincing, especially as it is unparalleled elsewhere.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Malone rightly notes that Hygelac’s speech occurs much later than the two passages, suggesting that Beowulf was encouraged to make the trip.⁵⁰ Of course, the inconsistency is perceptible to a careful reader, especially if they have read the poem multiple times, but it is doubtful whether it would have been noticed in oral performance.

Generally speaking, the structure of narratives destined to be performed orally is based on the assumption that the audience will only

⁴⁶ The possibility of conflicting sources is raised for instance by Malone in ‘Beowulf the Headstrong’.

⁴⁷ As far as I know, no one has tried to account for the discrepancy in a postmodern way, arguing that this is a deliberate suggestion that truth is unknowable or that personal opinions are inherently unstable and unreliable.

⁴⁸ Bammesberger, ‘Who Advised Beowulf to Challenge Grendel?’

⁴⁹ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 204, n. 6.

⁵⁰ Malone, ‘Beowulf the Headstrong’.

be able to keep immediate details clearly in mind, while more distant elements will only leave broad impressions. As a consequence, such narratives (much like narratives delivered in multiple instalments), typically take the form of a series of episodes,⁵¹ where each episode may be very artfully constructed, but where the overall structure is usually quite loose, relying more on an interplay of echoes than on a tightly controlled architecture. It is entirely possible for a poet to invite comparison between two episodes by reinforcing parallels or contrasts, but the further apart the two passages, the stronger the parallel or contrast would have to be.

With more than a thousand lines between them, the two passages considered here would have to be much more sharply contrasted to be effective. In fact, if establishing a contrast was the intention of the poet, there would have been much more conventional ways of achieving it. If the aim had been to show that Hygelac's love for Beowulf was stronger than his wisdom, putting him at odds with his counsellors, it would have been most effective to mention that explicitly in the same episode. This could easily have been done in the first passage, where the narrator is speaking, and also in the inquit of Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar. Another option would have been to have two contrasted episodes next to each other, each showing a different side. Alternatively, if the poet had wished to show a change of heart on Hygelac's part, that change could also have been described explicitly and, if it had not, it would have needed to be highlighted with extremely strong patterning to ensure that the audience would perceive that the scene was meant to be interpreted in light of an earlier episode.

The devices suggested here (contrasted episodes close to each other; direct narratorial intervention in an inquit or elsewhere; use of emphatic contrasted patterns) are all very conventional in Old English poetry. Conversely, the use of two diverging statements many lines apart to suggest something meaningful seems to be a tactic much more typical of modern literature than of Old English poetry.

The mentions that Beowulf was encouraged to go or dissuaded from it are not at the centre of the episodes in which they appear (and thus are not very likely to leave a strong enough impression to be remembered for long). On the other hand, as noted by Malone, they appear to be useful supporting elements in those passages. When Beowulf claims that he benefits from the approval of his people, it serves the purpose of making him appear more credible as he first meets the Danes and has yet to prove himself in front of them and in front of the audience of the poem. Similarly, Hygelac, by stating his fears, draws attention once again to how dangerous Beowulf's mission

⁵¹ On the structure of oral narratives, see Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, pp. 36–7.

was (and thus to how great a hero Beowulf has proved) and to the high esteem in which he holds Beowulf. In each case, the local coherence of the passage is reinforced and the audience is likely to retain the important idea expounded – that Beowulf is a great hero. On that level, the poem is perfectly coherent at the scale of the whole poem as well:

Beowulf's qualities of mind and heart ... are fixed and constant; they govern, and are exhibited with complete consistence in all that he says and does. This consonance between the man and all his actions, in youth and age, in life or death, establishes the inner unity of his *Heldenleben*.⁵²

Such constancy itself is surprising from a more modern perspective. On the one hand, for the sake of psychological realism we would expect a character to show some variation or evolution. On the other hand, we expect factual details to be consistent, no matter whether they are actually important in the story. It seems that the *Beowulf* poet takes the opposite tack. The main protagonist is very consistently portrayed as a great hero,⁵³ and in each episode the details selected contribute to that overall picture, but no care seems to be taken to ensure that the various factual details are consistent with each other in the whole poem: such details seem to have a purely local function.

In some cases, however, Old English poems may display conflicting representations of an object that cannot be considered minor or relevant only on a local scale. A particularly interesting example is provided by the poem *Genesis B*. In chapter 3 of *Genesis*, a serpent appears to tempt Adam and Eve and most commentators agree that the serpent must be considered an instrument of the devil.⁵⁴ In *Genesis B*, the nature of the tempter is less obvious. At first, we are explicitly told that a demon is taking on the appearance of a serpent before approaching Adam (*Wearp hine þa on wyrmes lic*, 'then he took on the appearance of a snake', 491a). Soon after, Adam's words seem to confirm that

⁵² Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, pp. 77–8.

⁵³ Generally speaking, Old English poems seem to take care in representing consistently positive protagonists. Furthermore, in poems translated from a Latin source, it seems that the trend is much stronger in the Old English version than in the source. Juliana and Judith, for instance, are much more ambivalent characters in the Latin sources: Juliana leads Eleusius on, suggesting she will accept him if he becomes a prefect, while Judith deliberately seduces Holofernes in order to betray him. In the Old English poems, those elements are removed and the protagonists are consistently portrayed as pure and faithful. The *Genesis A* poet seems to have attempted something similar, though the challenge is greater in this case. Several episodes of the biblical account are morally dubious (in particular Abraham sleeping with his servant or passing off his wife as his sister to ensure his own safety), but are too important to be removed altogether. As a consequence, the poet is constrained to retain them but always uses very positive epithets to describe Abraham, presumably to rebalance the overall effect (see Stévanovitch, *La genèse du manuscrit Junius XI*, vol. 1, p. 200).

⁵⁴ See Burchmore, 'Traditional Exegesis and the Question of Guilt in the Old English *Genesis B*', p. 110; Evans, '*Genesis B* and its Background', pp. 1–3.

the demon's appearance is not that of an angel, at least not that of a true angel still faithful to God (*Bu gelic ne bist / ænegum his engla þe ic ær geseah*, 'you are not like any of his angels that I have seen before', 538b–539).⁵⁵

Nowhere in the text is there any mention of the demon changing appearance after that scene. And yet, when Eve recounts the tempter's visit, she describes a radiant angel:

and þes boda sciene,
godes engel god, ic on his gearwan geseo
þæt he is ærendsecg unces hearran,
hefocnynges. (*Genesis B*, 656b–659a)⁵⁶

The illustrations of the manuscript also give changing representations of the tempter,⁵⁷ though they do not follow the text exactly: the demon is represented as a serpent on page 20, facing lines 389 to 408 (i.e. before the temptation), then as a radiant angel on pages 24, 28 and 31 (during the temptation) and then as a demonic being at the bottom of page 31, after Adam and Eve have both eaten of the apple.

For a long time, the angelic appearance of the demon during its confrontation with Eve was not challenged. It was perceived as one of the text's original features by comparison with its source and critics were mostly concerned with the quality of the illusion: should Eve have been able to realise that the tempter was not truly an angel or was she faced with a deception too perfect to detect?⁵⁸ Towards the end of the 1970s, a new theory appears: what if the demon truly looked like a serpent, just as in the Bible, and Eve's words were meant to show that she is blind to the truth? Doane provides the following summary in his edition of the text:

⁵⁵ It is possible (though by no means certain) that the possessive ('his angels') is meant to remind the audience that there are now two kinds of angels: the fallen and the unfallen.

⁵⁶ 'And this beautiful messenger [is] a good angel of God. I see from his clothes that he is a messenger of our lord, the king of heaven.'

⁵⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, whose facsimile is available in Muir's digital edition, *Ms. Junius 11*.

⁵⁸ As noted by Overing in her review of scholarship at the beginning of 'On Reading Eve', critics concerned with Christian matters tend to think that Eve is guilty for being deceived so easily, whereas critics interested in the Germanic peculiarities of the text tend to be more understanding. The former group includes Woolf, 'The Fall of Man in *Genesis B* and *The Mystère d'Adam*'; Vickrey, 'The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*'; Ehrart, 'Tempter as Teacher'; and Finnegan, 'Eve and "Vincible Ignorance" in *Genesis B*', as well as 'God's *Handmaegen* versus the Devil's *Craeft* in *Genesis B*'. The latter group includes Evans, '*Genesis B* and its Background'; Cherniss, *Ingeld and Christ*, p. 165; Hill, 'The Fall of Angels and Man in the Old English *Genesis B*'; and Lucas, 'Loyalty and Obedience in the Old English *Genesis* and the Interpolation of *Genesis B* into *Genesis A*'. Feminist critics also tend to look on Eve's character more tolerantly: Klinck, 'Female Characterisation in Old English Poetry and the Growth of Psychological Realism'; Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, pp. 65–79; Renoir, 'Eve's I.Q. Rating'; and Mintz, 'Words Devilish and Divine'.

Jane Morgan Barry and Susan Burchmore argue that if the poem is taken literally on the narrative level, the snake is the only form the tempter takes and he retains this shape at least until Eve has completed her act of disobedience by eating ... What Eve sees must be a product of the same evil will that produced her disobedience.⁵⁹

Since 1991, critics who have rejected that view have chosen one of two approaches. For Shippey,⁶⁰ the discrepancy must be seen as one of the flaws in a poem that is not perfect, whereas Overing and Buchelt suggest very abstract postmodern interpretations, which thoroughly deconstruct the text to the point where its interpretability is called into question. For the two critics, the impossibility of resolving the discrepancy between Eve's point of view and the narrator and Adam's betrays a desire to offer a complex text, in contradiction with the strict limits imposed by traditional forms of representation.⁶¹

All those approaches have one thing in common: they interpret the text in a modern or postmodern way. Those who question the effectiveness of the demon's disguise think of the textual world as a 'real world', where Eve is a person capable of perception and cognition independently from the narrator's words. In other words, even if the narrator says nothing about what Eve sees or thinks, it is possible to guess by imagining what an actual person would see and think in such a situation. Barry, Burchmore and Doane do not really move away from that approach. In fact, they explicitly make the point that Eve is endowed with a point of view peculiar to her, inviting us to see a distinction between that biased point of view and the point of view of the narrator, seen as more reliable. Shippey, Overing and Buchelt take some distance from that way of thinking as they accept the possibility that the text may not represent a perfectly coherent world modelled on the real world, but their interpretations are still very (post)modern: the discrepancy is either a 'lapse from artistic dignity' or a deliberate strategy to destabilise the audience.

The way points of view are handled in the rest of the Old English poetic corpus should encourage us to be cautious. In the absence of more evidence, it seems very unlikely that Eve's point of view is meant to be seen as entirely unreliable, or that its limits are meant to be under-

⁵⁹ Doane, *The Saxon Genesis*, p. 141. The two studies alluded to are Burchmore, 'Traditional Exegesis and the Question of Guilt in the Old English *Genesis B*'; and Barry, 'The Angel of Light Tradition in Biblical Commentary and English Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance'. On the connection between sin and blindness, see above 'Antagonists Sharing the Same View'.

⁶⁰ Shippey, 'Hell, Heaven, and the Failures of *Genesis B*', p. 151.

⁶¹ Overing, 'On Reading Eve' ('the poet offers a vision of her [Eve] that confuses and escapes the boundaries of representation as these had been laid out by the divine Word', p. 62); Buchelt, 'All about Eve' ('the compiler/s' agenda to complicate the theological and linguistic conundrum represented by the tale of the Fall', p. 150).

stood as implicit criticism of the character (or as an indictment of the power of language to make sense). If Eve's point of view was meant to be rejected, it would very likely be immediately refuted by another character and / or the narrator would warn the audience by pointing out the ignorance or the sinfulness of the character before the speech.⁶² The fact that *Genesis B* is not an original text but a translation from Old Saxon is not sufficient for us to expect a treatment of point of view radically different from the rest of the Old English corpus. Certainly, one would expect Old Saxon texts to work in a manner much more similar to Old English than to (post)modern English texts.

In the absence of a clear signal that Eve's words are not to be trusted, one must admit that Eve's description of the tempter is to be accepted as part of the representation of the tempter given by the poet. Furthermore, in this case, it cannot be argued that the conflicting representations each serve a local function and are too far apart for inconsistency to be relevant, as in the case examined above. The role of the demon is much too central and Adam and Eve's story would have been much too well known for such inconsistency to simply go unnoticed. Moreover, it is interesting that even though the illustrations are only relatively loosely based on the text, in their own way they also give the devil multiple representations.

As often, a broader look at the Old English corpus suggests another possibility. In Old English poems, the moral integrity of the main protagonists tends to be represented as perfectly constant, but other objects of representation seem more unstable, particularly supernatural ones. The most striking example is undoubtedly the description of the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*:

Geseah ic þæt fuse beacen
wendan wædum ond bleom; hwilum hit wæs mid wætan bestemed,
beswyled mid swates gange, hwilum mid since gegyrwed. (21b–23)⁶³

In this passage, the Cross has two distinct appearances, reflecting its dual nature: instrument of death and object of veneration. The two images do not correspond to two distinct points of view on the same object, but to a single point of view (*Geseah ic*) on a complex reality. It is worth noting that the absence of several competing points of view in Old English poetry is therefore not incompatible with a complex, multidimensional representation.

⁶² Eve's speech is not followed by an answering speech from Adam, which is all the more remarkable as he had declared only shortly before that the messenger was unlike an angel (538b–539). If the representation was realistic (which it is not), one would expect Adam to express his disagreement here.

⁶³ 'I saw the eager sign change ornaments and colours; at times it was wet with humidity, covered with a flow of blood, and at times it was ornamented with treasure.'

The two representations of the Cross seem completely at odds with each other and yet they coexist. The shifting appearance of the object does not reflect an unstable nature, but a reality that exceeds the sensible world. The Cross is not truly changing form. It is always both an instrument of death and an instrument of glorious resurrection and that nature is unchanging. It seems as if it is impossible for a human mind, even in a dream, to comprehend the two at the same time and that this is why the dreamer's vision oscillates between the two pictures.

Devils too are beyond the realm of ordinary human perception and it is not impossible that the apparent instability of the devil's representation in *Genesis B* reflects that supernatural status. Certainly, representations of the devil in Old English literature show remarkable fluidity. According to Dendle, prose and verse texts often give conflicting representations of the devil, in terms of location (wandering the world or chained in hell), number (one or many) and identity (Satan or merely a subordinate demon). Dendle also notes that some texts try to explain or reconcile those diverging pictures, but many do not. Additionally, it seems that translators feel the form of the devil is something that can be handled more freely than other elements of the narrative:

One of the narrative registers that Old English translators perceived as most flexible was the form assumed by the devil. If the source text indicates that the devil appears, Old English composers never substitute another type of functional villain. But, having faithfully preserved the character of the devil, the translators apparently feel greater liberty in altering the devil's shape, and the means by which he enters and exits the scene.⁶⁴

One may see that flexibility as a mere reflection of the fact that in Christian mythology devils have the capacity to take different shapes. In that case, the versatility of Old English demonic figures would merely be a strictly mimetic reflection of that fact. However, there might be more to it. It is interesting that, in Dendle's words, translators are careful to retain 'the character of the devil' but feel very free with its 'shape'.

This reflects a larger trend in Old English representations, which tend to be more concerned with what things are than with what they look like:

The world of Anglo-Saxon poetry is a world of fundamental contrasts, designed, like gnomic poetry, to illustrate the substance rather than the accidents of things.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Dendle, *Satan Unbound*, pp. 118–19.

⁶⁵ Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature*, p. 174.

One symptom of that attitude is the relative paucity of information regarding the features or complexion of the protagonists. Descriptive elements usually focus on evaluating the beauty, the strength and the opulence of the character, but do not provide much in the way of visual details. In other words, the only information provided is what sheds light on the status of the character (what archetype it fits), not what would allow the audience to form a visual representation of the character as an individual.

The 'substance' of the devil is a relatively tricky issue as it is made of deception and instability. Unlike all of God's creatures, the devil has no home or face that can truly be considered his own – since the Fall, he has been condemned to be misplaced and misshapen. This probably explains why representations of the devil in Old English literature (and in the illustrations of Junius 11) show such versatility. There is no need for the devil to 'actually' change shape. Essentially, he is always both a fair tempter and an ugly monster, a pitiful wretch and a cruel tormenter. As such, illustrators and poets are free to represent him under whatever traits are most effective (i.e. whatever appearance best allows the audience to understand what role the devil is performing), because all of them are always true in the only way that matters – true to the devil's substance.

Seen in that context, the inconsistencies between the representations of the devil provided by the narrator, Adam and Eve in *Genesis B*, do not need to be explained in terms of diverging points of view (or to suppose the existence of a missing scene where the demon would transform from a serpent into the semblance of a beautiful angel). In all probability, the fact that each representation of the devil is given through a different entity is merely coincidental. The narrator could very well have given such conflicting representations in their own voice, just as the illustrator apparently saw no problem in modifying the appearance of the demon from one illustration to the other in order to better express its attitude.

Conclusion

All the evidence available points to the fact that the structure of point of view is handled very differently in Old English poetry and in (post) modern literature. First of all, Old English poets do not seem to construct distinct points of view for their characters and for the narrator. All are equally reliable, unless the character is explicitly presented as blind and deluded.

Second, Old English poets do not feel the need for coherence in quite the same places as we do. It is always difficult to make generalisations, but it seems that, on the whole, as a present-day audience, we

expect the outside world to be relatively reliable and subject to objective observation, whereas we are quite willing to accept the changeability of human thoughts and feelings. As such we tend to be biased in that we expect 'verifiable facts' to be consistent in a narrative, whereas we most admire characters that show inner conflicts and ambiguities. Old English poetry often disappoints such expectations, precisely because poets (and presumably their audience) appear to care a great deal more about the constancy of their main protagonists than about the 'accidents of things'.

Third, the fact that Old English narratives do not rely on a multiplicity of points of view does not mean that they only show a unidimensional vision of the world. As noted earlier,⁶⁶ the appositive style is in itself a subtle tool in that it allows poets to paint the multiple facets of a character without having to choose between them or to explain how they work together. As shown in this chapter, in some extreme cases relating to the supernatural world, poets can juxtapose very different representations of the same object in the same poem without attributing them to distinct points of view or providing a literal explanation such as a metamorphosis. In such cases, it seems that, for poets, the complexity of the object is not the product of multiple and possibly contradictory points of view, but rather inherent to the object itself.

As a conclusion, it seems that the notion of point of view is not always very pertinent for the Old English narrative poetic corpus. At the very least, it should be handled with care and present-day audiences approaching an Old English narrative poem should probably assume that only one point of view is represented in it, unless there is very compelling evidence to suggest otherwise.

This fact has very important consequences for interpretation. If characters are not endowed with an individual point of view, but merely express the point of view of the poem as a whole, then what they say about how they perceive the world cannot be taken as a reflection of their individuality. In other words, there can be no implicit characterisation through the representation of a peculiar, biased point of view.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 2, 'Formality and Efficiency' (pp. 68–70).

Impossible Irony

In texts produced by a very different culture to one's own, some elements are always particularly difficult to interpret correctly. Notoriously, humour does not translate very well from one culture to another, while implicit suggestions are by nature more elusive than explicit statements. Understandably, then, irony, which is a form of humour relying on implicitness,¹ is very tricky to interpret correctly in a text from a different culture.

In spite of this inherent difficulty, the concept of irony has proved very popular in Old English studies. Of all the books and articles on Old English poetry consulted for this work, at least one in ten uses the concept, which is a considerable proportion. However, it seems that many of them use the term rather loosely. Certainly, very few provide a precise definition for it. As a consequence, it is difficult to determine whether its application to a particular example is appropriate or not. This chapter will examine the notion and its theoretical implications in detail before reviewing the main passages of Old English poetry that have been interpreted as ironic by scholars.

The Concept of Irony

Like many other rhetorical concepts, the word 'irony' has its origins in ancient Greek. The word *eirôneia* (εἰρωνεία) is derived from *eirôn* (εἰρων), which designates someone cunning, a liar and a deceiver. Since Plato's *Republic*, the concept has become closely associated in classical philosophy with the way that Socrates uses feigned ignorance and naivety to question his addressees and lead them towards a better understanding.² Classical rhetoric usually retains that reference to Socrates, but it also develops a concept of irony as a mere antiphrastic trope, that is, as the use of a phrase to mean the contrary of its literal signification.³

¹ See below ('The Concept of Irony') for a more precise definition.

² See Perrin, *L'ironie mise en trope*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*

The definition of irony as an antiphrastic trope is very problematic and almost universally rejected today.⁴ One aspect of the rejection has to do with the interpretation of tropes more generally. Classical rhetoric tends to analyse tropes as devices where the literal meaning of a lexical item has to be mechanically replaced by another, related meaning. Thus, the metaphor 'he was a true lion' is interpreted as 'he was very strong' and the ironic statement 'he is very clever' is interpreted as 'he is very stupid'. Such interpretations are based on an understanding of language that does not differentiate between the signification of a sentence no matter what its context is and the meaning of an utterance in context, i.e. between semantics and pragmatics. These interpretations try to account for tropes on a purely semantic level, whereas such devices are heavily dependent on context in order to be understood.

The development of pragmatics as a subfield of linguistics has allowed for a renewed interpretation of tropes, which recognises that tropical meanings are never inherent to a linguistic form but always at least in part the product of context.⁵ This interpretation solves the mystery of why words can occasionally (but only occasionally) mean something very different from their literal signification. It also explains why, particularly in the case of irony, it can be difficult to pinpoint where exactly the trope is in the sentence – in fact, the trope is not *in* the sentence, it results from a potentially complex interplay between linguistic and contextual elements.

The basic rules governing that interplay have been described by Grice in his *William James Lectures*.⁶ Grice explains that conversation is governed by a 'cooperative principle', which posits that interactants will usually not deliberately disrupt conversation by contributing things that are obviously false or irrelevant.⁷ In that sense, conversation

⁴ Few studies on Old English even mention that interpretation of the concept and none of those who do actually rely on it for their interpretation. Clark traces its uses in Anglo-Saxon England (with reference in particular to Bede's *De schematibus et tropis sacrae scripturae*), but does not rely on it in his analysis (*A Case for Irony in Beowulf*, pp. 16–23) whereas DeGregorio only presents that interpretation of the notion to better reject it ('Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 311 n. 8).

⁵ See Perrin, *L'ironie mise en trope*. In particular, Perrin quotes Searle (p. 20), in *Expression and Meaning* (p. 77): 'sentences and words have only the meaning that they have. Strictly speaking, whenever we talk about the metaphorical meaning of a word, expression, or sentence, we are talking about what a speaker might utter it to mean, in a way that departs from what the word, expression, or sentence actually means.'

⁶ The lectures, delivered at Harvard in 1968, have never been published in their entirety, though the notes have been circulated and have thus proved influential (see Sperber and Wilson, 'Remarques sur l'interprétation des énoncés selon Paul Grice', p. 80). Part of the lectures has been published as 'Logic and Conversation'.

⁷ 'Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged' (Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', p. 45). See also above, Chapter 4, 'Secular Performance' (pp. 151–7).

is not entirely free but operates within set parameters.⁸ According to Grice, implicit and non-literal meanings are understandable precisely because of those parameters. Whenever a statement is in blatant contradiction with the cooperative principle, this acts as a signal for the addressee to look for another meaning, which is consistent both with the literal signification of the utterance and with the cooperative principle. Thus, in the example suggested above, the utterance 'he was a true lion' can be interpreted as literal in some contexts, if the subject's referent is truly a lion, but if the subject's referent is a man and the addressee knows that, then, by virtue of the cooperative principle, the addressee will assume that the speaker is not spouting nonsense, but that they are trying to make a relevant point. They will then deduce that the speaker means that the man shares some characteristics with an actual lion, presumably strength or courage, as those are the two attributes most commonly associated with lions in our culture.⁹

Grice's analysis still takes a rather mechanical view of the tropes in that it seems to suggest that the addressee will automatically substitute the obvious appropriate meaning for the literal one. Several critics have taken issue with that view. First, Grice seems to suggest that there will always be one obvious meaning. In fact, in the example above, some meanings are more likely than others, but it is not necessarily clear whether the speaker is primarily referring to strength, to courage, to predatory instincts, to the ability to rule over others or to any other characteristic potentially attributable to both men and lions. In fact, the speaker may not have intended one characteristic in particular, but something broader. Likewise, most tropes will often suggest a range of meanings rather than a definite single one.

Second, he seems to suggest that, as in the classical rhetorical model, the addressee is meant to substitute one meaning for the other. But if this is true, then what is the point? Why use a trope instead of stating the intended message plainly from the start? In fact, as several scholars have suggested,¹⁰ the literal meaning is useful in itself. It is not to be taken as literally true, of course, but it is not to be discarded

⁸ The 'parameters' are described by Grice as a set of maxims: a maxim of quantity (say enough but not too much), a maxim of quality (do not lie deliberately), a maxim of relation (be relevant) and a maxim of manner (speak in a way that can be understood), pp. 45–6. The list is not meant to be exhaustive or absolute: Grice recognises himself that different situations will call for slightly different parameters.

⁹ More specifically, Grice claims that in such cases it is the maxim of quality (do not lie) that is infringed. However, Sperber and Wilson ('Remarques sur l'interprétation des énoncés selon Paul Grice', p. 84) have rightly pointed out that such is not always the case and that other infringements can have the same effect.

¹⁰ See Sperber and Wilson, 'Remarques sur l'interprétation des énoncés selon Paul Grice'; Perrin, *L'ironie mise en trope*, especially pp. 40–50; and Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, pp. 57–88. Hutcheon's work only concerns irony, but what she writes about irony's 'inclusiveness' can also be applied to other tropes.

either. Rather, it is meant to suggest a powerful image, something that will appeal to the imagination of the addressee and thus give more impact to the statement. In other words, in the example used so far, the addressee is not just meant to deduce that the subject's referent is strong or brave – they are also encouraged to imagine the referent as a lion or at least to hold the image of an actual lion in their mind at the same time as they think of the referent's more leonine qualities. In other words, what the statement loses in clarity (through indirectness), it makes up for in evocative power.

Third, Grice's analysis retains one problem concerning irony specifically – it is still treated as a trope of inversion, i.e. as a way for the speaker to mean the opposite of what is literally signified. In fact, it has been pointed out that in most cases what is meant is different but not necessarily the opposite of what is said literally,¹¹ so irony actually covers a broader spectrum than what Grice's analysis would suggest. On the other hand, it would be excessive to consider that any statement whose underlying meaning is different from its literal one is ironic. In other words, the usual definition of irony is much too narrow to account for what is usually considered ironic, but it is necessary to find a definition that is not too broad either, at least not to the point that it could include almost any trope.

Sperber and Wilson try to account for the specificity of irony by describing it as an echoic 'mention' of a statement rather than as a 'use' of that statement. To put it simply, according to Sperber and Wilson, when someone says 'What lovely weather' during a downpour, they are not actually making an assertion about the weather (i.e. they are not *using* the words 'What lovely weather' to make that assertion), but they are making an assertion about the phrase itself (i.e. they mention the phrase 'What lovely weather' to comment on it). By mentioning such an utterance, the speaker is both drawing attention to its content and dissociating themselves from it and from 'the state of mind that might give rise to it'.¹² It is only as a consequence of that dissociation that the implicit meaning 'the weather is dreadful' can be retrieved and that implicit meaning is not even primarily what the speaker is trying to convey (indeed it is presumably obvious and thus irrelevant). What they want to convey is an attitude to the phrase 'What lovely weather' in that context.

Sperber and Wilson further point to cases where the phrase being made mention of has actually been used by someone else a moment before. In particular, they provide this example from *Pride and Prejudice*:

¹¹ See in particular Sperber and Wilson, 'Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction'; Perrin, *L'ironie mise en trope*.

¹² Sperber and Wilson, 'Irony and the Use-Mention Distinction', p. 302.

'Who that knows what his misfortunes have been, can help feeling an interest in him?'

'His misfortunes!' repeated Darcy contemptuously; 'yes, his misfortunes have been great indeed.'¹³

In this example, it is clear that Darcy does not literally mean that Wickham has suffered great misfortunes, and that he is taking issue with the phrase chosen by Elizabeth: he is mentioning it in order to better dissociate himself from it. What matters to Darcy is not Wickham's state as such (and whether it is unfortunate or not), but Elizabeth's assessment of it. Sperber and Wilson see such echoic mention as the defining paradigm of irony.

One problem with that analysis is that, in most cases, the phrase being made mention of has not actually been expressed before. The argument promoted by Sperber and Wilson that the initial occurrence always exists in some way, but that it may be only a thought, or something imagined, seems somewhat precarious.¹⁴ This difficulty has been solved by Ducrot, who reinterprets Sperber and Wilson's work in the light of enunciation theories. For him, what the speaker is commenting on in ironic statements is not the content of the statement, as suggested by Sperber and Wilson, but the point of view behind it.¹⁵

Ducrot makes a distinction between 'speaker' ('locuteur') and 'utterer' ('énonciateur'). For him, the speaker is the implied author of the utterance (usually identifiable with the actual person speaking, though that is not necessarily the case, for instance in Represented Speech), whereas the utterers are the abstract figures (rather like characters in a novel or in a play) holding responsibility for the speech acts performed in the utterance.¹⁶ In the most straightforward assertions, the utterer can be identified with the speaker and the actual speaking person. In an ironic statement, however, the speaker presents the utterance as an assertion for which they take no personal responsibility. On the contrary, the responsibility for the speech act is rejected on the figure of an (usually indefinite) other utterer, whereas the speaker makes it clear that they not only disagree with the point of view of that utterer but actually consider it absurd.¹⁷ In other words, an ironic statement is not an echoic mention of a statement whose *content* is deemed absurd, but a representation of an absurd *point of view* from which the speaker is distancing themselves.

¹³ Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 127 (Book II, chapter 11).

¹⁴ For a criticism of this aspect of Sperber and Wilson's theory, see for instance Simpson, *On the Discourse of Satire*, pp. 92–3.

¹⁵ In fact, Sperber and Wilson seem to suggest something very similar in their own work already, when they say that what the speaker communicates is an attitude to the statement mentioned and to 'the state of mind that might give rise to it', but they do not pursue that particular line of thought further in their paper.

¹⁶ Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*, p. 152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

There is something very dramatic to the device in that the speaker is performing two stances at the same time: their own and that of another, unspecified 'utterer'. When the stance of the utterer is exaggerated, it can become a parody. There is also something inherently divisive to the device in that it is a rejection of someone else's point of view. However, that divisiveness may be mostly for show: as noted by Booth, 'the building of amiable communities is often far more important than the exclusion of naive victims'.¹⁸ In other words, irony is very often used to create complicity with the audience against a point of view that may very well not actually be endorsed by anyone, and not necessarily to mock the point of view of an existing group or individual.¹⁹

If irony is truly to be understood in terms of stances and points of view, then its presence in the Old English narrative poetic corpus is very problematic given that the representation of differentiated points of view in that corpus is embryonic at best. And yet, many passages of Old English narrative poetry have been identified as ironic by some, which can only be explained if one of the three following hypotheses obtains: the enunciative view of irony is significantly flawed; or Old English poetry actually represents more differentiated points of view than it would seem at first glance; or what has been considered ironic by some is not actually ironic.

It is worth examining the way in which modern scholarship on Old English poetry uses the concept of irony. As noted above,²⁰ the classical, rhetorical definition of irony as a trope of inversion is mentioned by some, but never used as an actual tool for analysis. More often, reference is made to the works of Booth and Hutcheon. However, the critical tools derived from those works are not as helpful as could be wished. Booth, for instance, is referred to both by Ridsen and Liuzza but only in a rather general way, without engaging with the criteria he sets out to distinguish truly ironic statements from other non-literal meanings.²¹ As for Hutcheon, her typically postmodern approach is more political than truly technical. As a consequence, the definition that DeGregorio derives from her work is stimulating, but not entirely helpful:

According to Hutcheon, what makes irony semantically distinctive from other forms of figurative language is its inclusive, differential, and relational nature. Irony is 'inclusive' because, rather than rejecting a said

¹⁸ Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, p. 28.

¹⁹ For Perrin, on the other hand, mockery is an integral and important part of irony, see *L'ironie mise en trope*, pp. 96–104.

²⁰ See above (this chapter), n. 4.

²¹ Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*, referred to by Ridsen, 'Irony in *Beowulf*'; and Liuzza, 'Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*'.

for an unsaid meaning, it incorporates or 'includes' both the said and the unsaid into a genuine relationship of plurality; it is 'differential' because, strictly speaking, the meanings thus engendered form a relationship of difference rather than of antiphrastic opposition or logical contrariety; and it is 'relational' because it is the bringing together, the playing off of these different meanings against each other, which produces irony.²²

Those 'distinctive' features could actually very well be applied to most tropes: a metaphor similarly requires the addressee to keep in mind both the image and the reality ('inclusive'), in order to understand the difference between the usual meaning of the phrase and its metaphorical use ('differential') and to derive further meaning from the bringing together of an impossible image and an actual fact ('relational'). The crucial point is really the 'differential' aspect, which is, precisely, quite different for each trope.

Actually, most scholars of Old English do not rely on a precise theoretical definition of irony. Conveniently, Liuzza provides an explicit formulation of the way he thinks the word irony is used by Old English scholars (including himself): 'in its broad sense, as most modern critics use it, the term includes any instance in a literary work in which what is said is different from what is meant'.²³ Such a definition, of course, may include any trope and any indirect formulation. If it was adopted literally, irony could be discerned everywhere. As a matter of fact, some critics have found irony in many places in Old English texts and that tendency has been criticised. Niles, in particular, derides the 'ironic fallacy – the idea that two literary meanings are better than one, especially if one of them is sardonic'.²⁴

In practice, however, the spectrum of phenomena commonly identified as ironic in Old English narrative poetry is not quite as broad as Liuzza's formulation would suggest. The concept is used in three main ways: irony as mockery of a character by another, irony as a thought-provoking paradox or contradiction, and dramatic irony, i.e. the dramatic representation of the limitations of a character's point of view, often in a pathetic way. Those three aspects are considered in turn in the following pages in order to determine whether they are

²² Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, pp. 57–88, referred to by DeGregorio, 'Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*', pp. 312–13. Hutcheon is also referred to by Liuzza.

²³ Liuzza, 'Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 53. Liuzza justifies his decision to rely on a non-theoretical definition of irony (even though he does mention several theoretical works) in this way: 'Since this is not a paper about the theory of irony, I will proceed on the pragmatic if simplistic assumption that potential ironies in *Beowulf* can be recognized by analogy to the way we recognize irony in everyday life' (p. 58).

²⁴ Niles, 'Myth and History', p. 227. Liuzza ('Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*', n. 13) also quotes this comment from Dane (*The Critical Mythology of Irony*, p. 2): 'postromantic critics find in the word irony a convenient evaluative term for what is interesting, moral, or worth study in literature'.

pertinent for the analysis of Old English poetry and whether they can truly be attached to the concept of irony.

Irony as Mockery

Possible instances of ironic mockery are actually fairly rare in the corpus, but they have received much critical attention, which is not surprising given that most of them are found in the first part of *Beowulf*, which is by far the most studied text. Some critics, such as Jucker and Taavitsainen, see irony in all the interaction between Beowulf and Unferth:

Beowulf is invited to sit and tell of his famous victories. But first Unferth addresses Beowulf with a speech that is both heavily ironic and insulting to Beowulf. He accuses Beowulf of having risked his life for a foolish contest with Breca and for having lost the contest. He concludes his speech by saying that he does not expect Beowulf to be successful in an encounter with Grendel.²⁵

They speak of heavy irony, but without making it clear what precisely is ironic. Their summary of Unferth's words stress how critical of Beowulf he seems, but there is no notion of implicitness or indirection. In fact, the evaluation of Beowulf's prowess in Unferth's speech is very explicit: it is inferior to Breca's (518a, *hæfde mare mægen*, 'he had greater strength') and insufficient to overcome Grendel (525–8, *ðonne wene ic to þe wyrstan gebingea ... gif þu Grendles dearest / nihtlongne fyrst nean bidan*, 'so I expect a worse outcome for you ... if you dare wait for Grendel close by during one night'). Admittedly, the latter comment is phrased as litotes rather than as a blunt prediction of Beowulf's death, but the critical charge itself is quite overt.

By far, though, the best candidate for the presence of ironic mockery in the corpus is the opening of Beowulf's answer to Unferth. The term of address used is *wine min Unferth* ('my friend Unferth' or 'my dear Unferth'), which seems surprising given that there is no reason for the poet to represent a particularly friendly or affectionate relationship between the two characters at this stage: they have only just met and Unferth has just described Beowulf as a reckless and incompetent man. At first sight, then, it seems that the conditions for ironic interpretation are there.²⁶ Beowulf apparently uses a phrase at odds with what his real attitude to Unferth supposedly is, therefore the audience might

²⁵ Jucker and Taavitsainen, 'Diachronic Speech Act Analysis', p. 78.

²⁶ This interpretation is apparently retained by Gwara (*Heroic Identity in the World of Beowulf*, p. 111) and by Fulk, Bjork and Niles (*Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn, p. 152) though they speak of sarcasm and derision respectively, rather than of irony.

be encouraged to think that Beowulf is only derisively performing an attitude of friendship and not endorsing it literally.

However, other interpretations for that same phrase are possible. As pointed out by Orchard,²⁷ Beowulf's address echoes Hrothgar's earlier address to Beowulf. In both cases, a nobleman is greeting another that they have never met before, so it may very well be that the poet felt that the term of address was appropriate in terms of courtly etiquette and that personal likes and dislikes simply did not enter into it. It may not even be the intention of the poet to represent Beowulf as more polite than Unferth: as a stranger at Hrothgar's court, Beowulf does not enjoy the same prerogatives as Unferth and it is only reasonable that he should have to prove his goodwill and his courtesy more than Unferth, who is an insider. In other words, it is not impossible that, while Beowulf knows that Unferth is wrong regarding the contest with Breca and is about to prove it, he is acting respectfully both by addressing Unferth politely and by providing a detailed narrative to assuage Unferth's doubts.

Further evidence from the context would be necessary to determine whether Beowulf's greeting is ironic rather than literally respectful, but such evidence is elusive. The phrase *beore druncen* (531a), which postmodifies the term of address, could constitute evidence if it meant 'drunk with beer', but it would be more correctly interpreted as 'having drunk beer', which is not necessarily negative in itself, on the contrary.²⁸

For Orchard, the phrase might still have negative implications in that it suggests that Unferth is one of those men alluded to by Hrothgar (480–3) who swore an oath to kill Grendel over a drink (as was the custom for oath-taking) but who failed to deliver on that solemn promise.²⁹ This negative comment on Unferth's abilities would be consistent with Beowulf's later comment that Unferth has never shown prowess equal to his own (581b–583a) and, more generally, with the representation given of Unferth in the poem: neither the narrator nor Beowulf ever suggests that Unferth is a great hero comparable to Beowulf.

The extent of that criticism should not be overstated, however. Beowulf asserts his superiority (both over Breca and Unferth), but that does not necessarily mean he is mocking his opponents nor that he is talking to a respected member of Hrothgar's court derisively in front of Hrothgar himself. Undoubtedly, Beowulf is critical, even antagonistic, but nothing proves that he is ironic.

²⁷ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 250.

²⁸ On the positive symbolic value of drinking in Anglo-Saxon culture, see Magennis, 'The Beowulf Poet and his *Druncne Dryhtguman*'. See also Gould, 'Euphemistic Renderings of the Word *druncen* in *Beowulf*'.

²⁹ Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf*, p. 250.

The other passages that have been described as ironic are at least as problematic. Several critics have puzzled over the epithets used by Beowulf to describe Hrothgar and the Danes at the beginning of the poem.³⁰ Indeed, when Beowulf petitions for the right to defend Heorot against Grendel, he uses very positive phrases to describe Hrothgar and his men,³¹ which seem to be in contradiction with the actual failure of the Danes to protect Heorot. Similarly, at the end of his speech to Unferth, Beowulf mentions 'the terrible armed force of your people, the victorious Scyldings' (596–7, *atole ecgþræce eower leode ... Sigescyldinga*), precisely when he is saying that the Danes have proved unable to repel Grendel's onslaughts.

An ironic interpretation would be one way of explaining the contradiction: Beowulf would then actually be mocking the Danes and not celebrating their valour, which would be consistent with the acknowledgement of their failure against Grendel. However, such an interpretation is also problematic in that it suggests that Beowulf acts very insultingly towards his hosts. Hill and Liuzza are therefore hesitant on this point:

Is the word for 'victorious' ironic here at the expense of Danes who have been helpless against Grendel? And is there potential loss of face when Hrothgar turns the hall over to Beowulf? These are difficult questions ... but I think the overt drama runs counter to irony at Hrothgar's expense.³²

Beowulf soon afterwards addresses Hrothgar as *eodor Scyldinga* 'protector of the Scyldings' (428) when he asks permission to fight Grendel; it would be difficult to read the expression as intentionally ironic without questioning the hero's judgment in a situation which demands a full measure of formality, courtesy and above all tact ... Later, however, when Beowulf says to Unferth that Grendel has learned that he need not fear the swords of the *sigescyldinga* 'victorious Scyldings' (597), can we be so sure? Unferth has verbally assaulted Beowulf, and the hero is responding in kind ... it thus seems appropriate to appreciate the epithet as intentionally ironic, Beowulf's expression of restrained anger at his rude challenger. If this is so, of course, then we must conclude that the ironic juxtaposition of a traditional epithet and an incongruous context is within the range of possible tonal effects in the poem³³

³⁰ See in particular Clark, *A Case for Irony in Beowulf*; DeGregorio, 'Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*'; Liuzza, 'Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*'. On this passage, see also Chapter 4, 'Secular Performance' (pp. 151–7).

³¹ E.g. 427a, *brego Beorhtdena*, 'leader of the glorious Danes' and 429b, *wigendra hleo*, 'protector of warriors'.

³² Hill, 'Translating Social Speech and Gesture in *Beowulf*', p. 69.

³³ Liuzza, 'Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 60. Levine shows a somewhat less nuanced opinion: he grants that it is doubtful whether the terms used to address Hrothgar are ironic but claims that the words designating the Danes in Beowulf's speech to Unferth are necessarily ironic ('Direct Discourse in *Beowulf*', pp. 13 and 28).

Liuzza accepts the arguments put forward by DeGregorio and reproaches Hill's position with downplaying the complexity of the poem.³⁴ According to Liuzza, the discrepancy between the literal meaning of the epithets and the actual situation faced by the Danes cannot be a coincidence or the result of the constraints of traditional diction – it must be meaningful.³⁵ For Liuzza, there must be a wish on the poet's part to highlight the cruel discrepancy between an ideal fervently wished for but out of reach and a shameful reality. This interpretation is very compelling, but it seems rather different from irony in the strictest sense. Not only is mockery absent, but it seems that a contrast is established between what is yearned for and what is achieved rather than between two points of view. In that, Liuzza's interpretation seems closer to the second great category of 'ironic' uses identified by the critics – irony as a meaningful paradox or contrast.

Irony as Paradox

In common usage, the terms 'irony' and especially 'ironically' are often used very loosely, to describe anything paradoxical or unexpected. Similarly, many apparently paradoxical or inappropriate uses of vocabulary in *Beowulf*,³⁶ but also in hagiographic poems, have been described as ironic. Typical examples include the praise of Eleusius's status by Affricanus, when the text suggests that earthly honours are worthless and that only God deserves such reverence,³⁷ as well as, more generally, the use of positive heroic vocabulary to designate Juliana's opponents;³⁸ the use by Judas of the phrase *ferhð staðeliēn* ('to fix one's spirit', *Elene*, 427b), usually only used to express the stability of Christian faith, in order to urge the wise men to resist Elene's questioning;³⁹ the use of positive words denoting home or a sense

³⁴ DeGregorio, 'Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*', especially pp. 335–41, where DeGregorio criticises proponents of oral-formulaic approaches more generally for what he sees as a refusal to accept the fact that Old English poetry may convey complex meanings.

³⁵ On this point, Liuzza takes his distances from DeGregorio, who favours a more open (and decidedly more postmodern) interpretation of the text: 'The panegyric epithets are part of a poly-perspectival matrix that contributes to the poem's decidedly ambiguous characterization of Hrothgar ... there are plural perspectives which remain plural, rather than eventually be given clarity and unanimity by the poem's structure, theme, surrounding traditions, or any other elucidating framework' (DeGregorio, 'Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 342).

³⁶ Liggins ('Irony and Understatement in *Beowulf*'), Clark (*A Case for Irony in Beowulf*) and DeGregorio ('Theorizing Irony in *Beowulf*') are particularly interested in that kind of irony.

³⁷ Calder, *Cynewulf*, p. 82.

³⁸ Hermann, 'Language and Spirituality in *Cynewulf's Juliana*', p. 269. See also Schneider, 'Cynewulf's Devaluation of Heroic Tradition in *Juliana*'.

³⁹ Calder, *Cynewulf*, p. 103.

of belonging to refer to hell in *Christ and Satan*;⁴⁰ Satan's pride in his own power in *Genesis B*, even though it is obviously sterile;⁴¹ and also the use of *mapelian* to introduce several speeches in the second half of *Beowulf*, even though the presence of an assembly is not as manifest as in the Danish episode.⁴²

The use of the concept of irony to describe such phenomena is potentially misleading. It suggests that two points of view are represented and that one of them is kept at distance and potentially derided. If the 'ironic' phrase is spoken by a character (for instance the phrase *ferhð staðelian* spoken by Judas), it suggests that either Judas is deliberately quoting a Christian phrase to mock the Christian point of view, which does not seem to be the case here, or that the narrator is ostensibly distancing themselves from Judas's point of view, pointing out its deficiencies with derision.

Such an interpretation is problematic for two reasons. First, the notion of derision does not seem appropriate here. Judas is a future saint and as such he deserves respect. He is also someone who is currently resisting the call of his destiny and in that he deserves some blame. Derision seems out of place. If there is a form of humour here, it can only be the kind of subtle insider joke based on the certainty that a knowledgeable audience will be able to recognise that the word is inappropriate here and to imagine what would be an appropriate context for it.

Second, if in this case the effectiveness of the device rests on a distance between the character's and the narrator's points of view, then how should we analyse instances where the 'ironic' phrase is spoken by the narrator and not by a character? Let us consider for instance the case of *Juliana*. On several occasions, Eleusius is referred to in highly positive terms, both by Affricanus and by the narrator. He is thus successively described as *rices hyrde* ('guardian of the kingdom', 66b, by the narrator), *peoden* and *peoden mæra* ('(illustrious) prince', 82a and 86a, by Affricanus) and *se dema* ('the judge', 549b and 602b, by the narrator). Such epithets are commonly used in Old English poetry to refer to God. Their use here seems to suggest an unbridgeable gap between the transitory and illusory earthly power of Eleusius and the true power of God.

It seems unlikely that the phrases quoted above do not all correspond to the same phenomenon. However, if they are interpreted as

⁴⁰ Sleeth, *Studies in Christ and Satan*, p. 104. He is particularly interested in the uses of *ham* ('home'), *eard* ('dwelling', 'native land') and *edel* ('native land', 'homeland'). Sleeth is only concerned with *Christ and Satan*, but it is worth noting that his remarks could also apply to *Guthlac A*.

⁴¹ Finnegan, 'God's Handmægen Versus the Devil's Cræft in *Genesis B*'.

⁴² Bjork, 'Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*', p. 1001. Most of the instances noted by Clark in *A Case for Irony in Beowulf*, too numerous to be all mentioned here, also fall into this category.

instances of irony relying on the representation of two distinct stances, then it seems difficult if not impossible to treat words spoken by the narrator and by a character in the same way: if the narrator is deliberately creating a distance between the flawed point of view of Affricanus and their own by having Affricanus use inappropriate words, then the use of very similar phrases in the narrator's own words is confusing at best.

If one accepts that the perspective structure of the poem is not based on differentiated points of view, however, a more satisfactory interpretation is possible. The manifest discrepancy outlined above is not actually between two points of view (what the pagans think is a true ruler and what the Christians know to be one), but between two objects: an absolute, ideal referent, inscribed in the poetic diction and the hagiographic genre as the only object fitting the meaning of the phrase exactly, and a contextual referent, in this case the character of Eleusius, who obviously does not meet the ideal standard expressed. By using, for instance, the phrase *se dema* to refer to Eleusius, the poet is forcing a comparison between two objects, that of the Roman prefect, swollen with rage, and that of the judge in majesty, presiding over the destiny of every soul. The contrast allows for an implicit indictment of the failings of the contextual referent. It is a typical example of what Robinson calls the appositive style; however, Robinson writes about terms 'invested with contrastive meaning and a slight situational irony by the dual perspectives in the poem'.⁴³ Robinson's formula highlights the essential elements of the device, but its use of the word 'irony' is perhaps regrettable. The device observed here might be a form of irony if the word is understood very loosely, but it is clearly different from the type of irony relying on two distinct and distanced points of view as shown in the extracts from *Middlemarch* and *Pride and Prejudice* quoted above.

It might actually be useful to coin a special name for that device so as to better differentiate it from irony in a narrower sense. One could call it 'heterotypy' in the sense that a phrase matching an archetypal referent is deliberately applied to a referent that is different from the archetype, precisely in order to invite comparison with the archetype. In some cases, the archetypal referent may be recoverable, as in the examples from *Juliana* above, where it is clearly the Christian God. In some other cases, it might be vaguer. If one thinks back to the epithets used for Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, the phrases *wigendra hleo* ('protector of warriors', 429b) and *freowine folca* ('noble friend of men', 430a) do not refer to a single individual referent. Through the poetic tradition they are closely connected to a number of 'orthotypical' referents and that

⁴³ Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, p. 55.

corpus of exemplary kings (or, to be more specific, of scenes of kingly exemplarity: after all, there are episodes when Hrothgar himself truly fits the archetype)⁴⁴ allows the audience to form a precise image of what the contextual referent is being measured up to.

It is worth noting that irony in the narrower sense is highly compatible with a pessimistic view of language (for instance with the idea that there is no possible literal meaning or that it is impossible to convey that meaning effectively) in that it allows the speaker not to take responsibility for their own words and thus to avoid the blame if the speech act is necessarily imperfect or even doomed to fail. On the contrary, heterotypy presupposes a great deal of confidence in language and its capacity to convey meaning. It implies that each word is associated with a 'true' referent, easily identifiable and thus capable of being used to measure the conformity of any new object described with that word. Whereas postmodern literature is apt to use discrepancies between the signified and the signifier to hint at the insufficiencies of language, it seems on the contrary that Old English poets use such discrepancies to signal the inferiority of some objects as compared with the collective norm inscribed in the poetic diction. It is therefore important not to confuse heterotypy with irony in the narrower sense so as not to misunderstand the view of language conveyed by Old English poems.

The importance of heterotypy as a device in Old English poetry can be seen not only from the great number of instances but also from the existence of more complex or indirect uses of heterotypy, whose effectiveness depends on the basic device being very familiar to both poets and their audience. First of all, it seems possible for heterotypy to be diffuse rather than tied to a specific word or phrase. Let us come back to the phrase *ferhð staðeliēn* (*Elene*, 427b) commented on above. For Bridges,⁴⁵ it is not just that phrase, but the whole behaviour of the Jews in that poem that evokes the ideal of *fortitudo* best exemplified by martyrs, even while it manifests a patent discrepancy with that ideal in that the firmness of the wise men's attitude is not the result of Christian faith. This could be regarded as a heterotypical use of the theme of *fortitudo*. For the device to be effective when it is so diffuse, however, it is essential that the archetype deviated from be very well known and easy to identify, even without the use of a key phrase.

It is also possible for the contrastive effect to be reinforced or reactivated through alliteration. Quirk mentions the case of line 2850 in *Beowulf* (*ac hy scamiende scyldas bæran*, 'but they, full of shame, bore

⁴⁴ Not only is Hrothgar explicitly (and literally) identified as a good king (863b), but he also proves himself worthy of the kingly ideal of generosity on multiple occasions as he rewards Beowulf very handsomely for his services (1020–49, 1782–4 and 1866–9).

⁴⁵ Bridges, *Generic Contrast in Old English Hagiographical Poetry*, p. 78.

Impossible Irony

shields') and claims that the alliteration of *scamiende* and *scyldas* suggests the inadequacy of the warriors who have proved unworthy of their role.⁴⁶ On its own, the word *scyldas* cannot be considered heterotypical: it merely designates a material object and on that level there is no inadequacy between the word and what the characters carry. The alliteration, however, suggests a connection between *scamiende* and *scyldas*, therefore calling to mind a more abstract meaning of *scyld*, 'protection', which can in turn produce a heterotypical effect since Beowulf's companions have proved incapable of fulfilling the role of protectors that was theirs as shield-bearers.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony occurs when a character shows, through their words or actions, that they are not as well informed or that they do not interpret the situation as lucidly as the narrator and the audience of the text. Once again, the device relies on the discrepancy between two points of view. However, in this case the effect is not necessarily mocking or derisive. Granted, the character is shown in a position of inferiority and their limitations are highlighted, but that abasement may invite compassion instead of derision. Critics have discerned two kinds of dramatic irony in the Old English corpus: a 'Germanic' irony, where a tragic fate looms over the situation at hand, and a Christian irony, indicting a character's blindness in the face of manifest truth.

The most striking example of the latter type is to be found in *Andreas*, when the saint converses with Christ disguised as a pilot. The whole effectiveness of the scene rests on the discrepancy between the information available to the character, who has no awareness of the pilot's true identity, and that available to the audience, who know that Andreas is actually conversing with God. For Bjork, this is an instance of dramatic irony aiming at criticising the 'spiritual deficiency' of Andreas.⁴⁷ Rowe further analyses the ironic potential of the situation and ties it back to a broader Germanic model:

[In the Old Norse model] [t]he subordinate character is ignorant of the other's identity and power, and asks his questions boldly and without deference. If the controlling character is doing the questioning, the other

⁴⁶ Quirk, 'Poetic Language and Old English Metre', p. 156. Mize also detects a 'sharp irony' in this passage (*Traditional Subjectivities*, p. 168).

⁴⁷ Bjork, *The Old English Verse Saints' Lives*, p. 113. Most critics also see dramatic irony in that scene, see especially Hamilton, 'The Diet and Digestion of Allegory in *Andreas'* Anglo-Saxon England', and 'Andreas and Beowulf: Placing the Hero', pp. 95–6; Earl, 'The Typological Structure of *Andreas'*', p. 85; and Wilcox, 'Eating People is Wrong', especially pp. 208–11.

is addressed with seemingly polite – but actually ironic – references to his wisdom ... While we do not see Andreas boldly demanding that Christ answer his questions, his enthusiasm ... in relating Christ's miracles to the one who performed them surely provides all the irony the model requires.⁴⁸

Rowe does not say explicitly what effect is intended, but seems to suggest a form of derision of the character.

Such interpretations are problematic for several reasons. First, the significance of the apparent closeness of the scene in *Andreas* to an Old Norse model is complicated by the fact that *Andreas* follows a source. Not only is the discrepancy between what Andreas knows and what the audience know already present in the Greek text, but it is actually marked more strongly there. In the *Praxeis Andreou*, the inquirers to Andreas's speeches specify twice that Andreas is unaware of who he is addressing.⁴⁹ The *recensio casanatensis* and the Old English poem treat the same passages somewhat differently:

Andreas vero nullo modo cognoscere potuit, quod ipse nauclerius, esset dominus iesus. (*recensio casanatensis*, § 7)⁵⁰

Næs him cuð þa gyt
hwa þam sæflotan sund wisode. (*Andreas*, 380b–381)⁵¹

Et cepit andreas intendere in iesum, dixitque ad eum (*recensio casanatensis*, § 9)⁵²

Ongan ða reordigan rædum snottor,
wis on gewitte, wordlocan onspeonn (*Andreas*, 469–70)⁵³

The Latin writer has kept only one of the two references to Andreas's ignorance – and even then it is only to justify it. The Old English poet, on the other hand, has chosen to stage a transformation: in the first passage, Andreas is described as deprived of important knowledge, but the adverbial phrase *þa gyt* already suggests that a change is coming, and then the second passage shows a character already full of wisdom and discernment.

Neither of those strategies seems to encourage an ironic interpreta-

⁴⁸ Rowe, 'Irony in the Old English and Old Norse Interrogative Situation', pp. 478–9.

⁴⁹ 'And Andrew answered and said to Jesus, not knowing he was Jesus' and 'Then Andrew turned to the Lord, not knowing that he was the Lord' (Boenig, *The Acts of Andrew*, pp. 5–6).

⁵⁰ 'Truly Andreas had no way of knowing that the same captain of the ship was the Lord Jesus.'

⁵¹ 'It was not yet known to them then who was directing the navigation of the ship.'

⁵² 'And Andreas turned towards Jesus and said to him'.

⁵³ 'The man prudent in counsels started to speak then, wise in his mind, to open his store of words'.

tion. After all, dramatic irony, just like ordinary irony, aims at discrediting one point of view and thus, implicitly, the person from whom that point of view originates. Let us consider, as a point of comparison, this passage from *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*,⁵⁴ where Tess and Angel confess to each other that they had sex with someone else before they got married:

'... Do you forgive me?'

She pressed his hand tightly for an answer.

'Then we will dismiss it at once and for ever – too painful as it is for the occasion – and talk of something lighter—'

'O Angel – I am almost glad – because now *you* can forgive *me*! I have not made my confession. I have a confession, too – remember, I said so.'

'Ah, to be sure! Now then for it, wicked little one.'

'Perhaps, although you smile, it is as serious as yours, or more so.'

'It can hardly be more serious, dearest.'

'It cannot – O no, it cannot!' She jumped up joyfully at the hope. 'No, it cannot be more serious, certainly,' she cried, 'because 'tis just the same! I will tell you now.'

The dramatic irony of the passage concerns the points of view of both characters. Angel's playful tone and his easy assurance that her sin cannot be as serious as his own reveal his blindness to the reader, who knows perfectly well what Tess is about to confess. In love with an unrealistic, idealised vision of a young girl, Angel is entirely incapable of comprehending the possibility that she could be, like him, fallible. As for Tess, her joy and her optimism reveal her naivety, and the reader suspects already that what Angel can forgive in himself, he will not forgive his wife.

In both cases, the discrepancy between what the character fails to see and what the reader knows (or guesses) is not a mere fact, but a clue to a more essential flaw in the character's point of view. That flaw may not be enough to make the character seem ridiculous or despicable – on the contrary, it makes Tess's innocence even more moving – but it does highlight a weakness, whether psychological (Tess's naivety) or ideological (Angel's bigoted attitude). In other words, if the point of view of a character is made up of their knowledge, their psychological disposition and their ideological orientation, then irony is not so much concerned with the first as with the latter two. The ignorance of the characters is not criticisable in itself, but because it is the result of a particular biased mindset.

It seems unlikely that such a phenomenon is at play in *Andreas*. Admittedly, whereas on other occasions there can be some doubt regarding what the character is supposed to know, here there is a very

⁵⁴ Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 177 (chapter 34).

clear contrast established between what the audience know and what Andreas does not. Furthermore, there is some connection between Andreas's failure to see the truth and a more fundamental moral failing. As noted earlier (p. 206), blindness in Christian writings is often interpreted as the result of sinfulness and there is a definite suggestion of that in St Andrew's legend: in the three versions of the tale discussed here, after Andreas realises the true identity of the pilot he asks him because of what sin he was unable to recognise him.

However, God's answer tends to be ambiguous. On the one hand, God's decision to appear under a disguise is presented as a consequence of Andreas's initial reluctance to undertake his mission. In the Old English poem, God even explicitly says that Andreas's reluctance was sinful.⁵⁵ On the other hand, all three versions (four with the Old English homily) insist on the fact that Andreas acted well when he was on the boat and that God is satisfied with him. What the episode shows is not the wilful blindness of a sinner who, having sinned once, sins again and will no longer recognise the truth. It shows a man who made a mistake once and is taught a lesson: Andreas underestimated God's power and his wisdom, therefore God demonstrates the extent of his powers through a miracle – God's appearance under the guise of a simple man. The Greek version is particularly explicit on this point as God explains that his intent was to show that he 'could do all things and appear to each person just as [he] wish[ed]'.⁵⁶ To some extent, the episode is also a test for Andreas: not a test of his capacity to recognise God (for God has deliberately hidden his true appearance), but a test of his faithfulness. Throughout the journey, Andreas proves through his words that his faith is still strong and in the end he is rewarded with the revelation of God's true presence.

Whereas the characters' points of view are at the very heart of Hardy's text, they play no major role in *Andreas*. Andreas sees what is shown to him and the extent and clarity of his perception is determined not by his own frame of mind but by God's decision to show or not to show the truth. In this sense, the dialogue between Andreas and the pilot is not ironic but 'apocalyptic' in the etymological sense of the word, i.e. it revolves around the revelation of what was hidden.

⁵⁵ *No ðu swa swiðe synne gefremedest / swa ðu in Achaia ondsæc dydest, / ðæt ðu on feorwegas feran ne cuðe / ne in þa ceastre becuman mehte* (*Andreas*, 926–9), 'You did not at all sin so much as when you made resistance in Achaia, [saying] that you did not know how to travel on distant ways and could not arrive in that city'. As noted by Boenig (*Saint and Hero*, p. 35), this differs slightly from the Greek source and the Old English homily where God assures Andreas that he committed no sin.

⁵⁶ Boenig's translation, *The Acts of Andrew*, p. 12.

The 'dramatic irony' in *Genesis B* is slightly more difficult to analyse,⁵⁷ though it does have similarities with the model found in *Andreas*. When Eve tries to persuade Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit, she seems to express a point of view that differs from the narrator's in several ways:

'Adam, frea min, þis ofet is swa swete,
bliðe on breostum, and þes boda sciene,
godes engel god, ic on his gearwan geseo
þæt he is ærendsecg uncres hearran,
hefoncyniges. ... Hwæt scal þe swa laðlic strið
wið þines hearran bodan? Unc is his hyldo þearf;
he mæg unc ærendian to þam alwaldan,
heofoncynige. Ic mæg heonon geseon
hwær he sylf siteð, (þæt is suð and east),
welan bewunden, se ðas woruld gesceop ...
Hwa meahte me swelc gewit gifan,
gif hit gegnunga god ne onsende,
heofones waldend?
... Nu hæbbe ic his her on handa, herra se goda;
gife ic hit þe georne. Ic gelyfe þæt hit from gode come,
broht from his bysene, þæs me þes boda sægde
wærum wordum. Hit nis wuhte gelic
elles on eorðan, buton swa þes ar sægeð,
þæt hit gegnunga from gode come.' (*Genesis B*, 655–83)⁵⁸

The most striking difference between Eve's accounts and the narrator's is with regards to the identity of the messenger and the legitimacy of its mission.⁵⁹ Several of the words used by the character seem in direct contradiction with those used by the narrator, who calls the tempter an enemy (*feond*, 688b) and his words lies (*ligenum*, 630a).

⁵⁷ Other types of irony have also been read into that poem. Vickrey ('The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*') and Klinck ('Female Characterisation in Old English Poetry and the Growth of Psychological Realism') both describe some kinds of contrasts or contradictions in the poem as ironic. As for Overing ('On Reading Eve') and Jager ('Tempter as Rhetoric Teacher'), they see a form of postmodern irony in the poem, a questioning of the ability of language to make sense (this interpretation has been harshly criticised by Shippey in 'Hell, Heaven, and the Failures of *Genesis B*', p. 163).

⁵⁸ 'Adam, my lord, this fruit is so sweet, so pleasant to my taste, and this radiant messenger is a good angel of God; I see from his clothes that he is an envoy of our lord, the king of heaven ... What shall such a hateful quarrel against the messenger of your lord do for you? We need his protection; he may intercede for us with the almighty, the king of heaven. I can see from here where he himself is sitting (that is in the south east), surrounded with wealth, he who created the world ... Who could have given me such perception, if God has not sent it to me directly, the ruler of heaven? ... Now I have his [fruit] here in my hand, my good lord; I will happily give you some. I believe that it comes from God, brought according to his commands, because this messenger has told me so with true words. It is unlike anything else on earth, unless just as this envoy says it comes directly from God.'

⁵⁹ On the appearance of the messenger, see Chapter 6, 'What Consequences for Interpretation?' (pp. 216–21).

To determine whether this is dramatic irony or not, it is crucial to ascertain whether the discrepancy results from a mere difference in access to information or whether it results from something more meaningful, some character flaw that prevents Eve from making the right decisions. This takes us back to the age-old scholarly debate about Eve:⁶⁰ should she have been capable of seeing through the devil's disguise or was it impossible? Or, to be more accurate, is Eve's point of view limited because of outside circumstances or because her flaws make her biased? The character's behaviour may be analysed from a strictly theological perspective, and some have done so in the past,⁶¹ but it is a difficult exercise inasmuch as it is difficult to determine with precision the intellectual and theological background of the poets behind the text, as well as in that the text is not a theological treatise but a narrative poem, which may very well privilege effective drama over theoretical accuracy.

The explicit clues present in the text paint a very favourable picture of Eve. She is shown as both beautiful and dedicated. The narrator also specifies that she acted in good faith and did not realise the actual significance of her actions (708–11). Furthermore, nothing in the text openly contradicts her notion that it is a good thing to obey the orders conveyed by a messenger of one's lord.⁶² The most original aspect of Eve's representation, however, regards her mental faculties. Twice, the poem alludes to a mental weakness that might account for the success met by the tempter: *wacran hige*, 590b ('weaker mind') and *wac gepoht*, 649a ('weak spirit'). That weakness may be interpreted in two different ways. For some critics,⁶³ it reflects the traditional theological opposition between Adam, who represents the mind, and Eve, who represents the bodily senses. However, Renoir points out that it is not obvious that a comparison is being made between Adam and Eve.⁶⁴ For him, it is more likely that the comparison is between Eve and the tempter, that is to say, between the two protagonists in that scene. If

⁶⁰ See Chapter 6, n. 58.

⁶¹ Among the analyses that rely on specific theological arguments to evaluate Eve's behaviour, one may quote Burchmore, 'Traditional Exegesis and the Question of Guilt in the Old English *Genesis B*'; Doane, *The Saxon Genesis*, especially pp. 148–53; Davis, 'Changing Senses in *Genesis B*'; and Cole, 'Jewish Apocrypha and Christian Epistemologies of the Fall'.

⁶² For Stévanovitch, to acknowledge an intermediary is in itself a change of allegiance and thus a fault, comparable to that of the angels who chose to follow Lucifer rather than God ('Trahison par fidélité', p. 186). However, this hypothesis is not explicitly supported by the text and one could argue that God's messengers are only extensions of God's powers and not independent powers in themselves, so that obeying a messenger would not imply a change of allegiance, quite the contrary.

⁶³ See Vickrey, 'The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*'; Hill, 'The Fall of Angels and Man in the Old English *Genesis B*'; and Burchmore, 'Traditional Exegesis and the Question of Guilt in the Old English *Genesis B*'.

⁶⁴ Renoir, 'Eve's I.Q. Rating', p. 269.

so, then Eve is not represented as particularly stupid, but, as a human being, she appears more limited than a supernatural being and thus vulnerable to its powers.

In either case, and this is what matters here, the narrator does not present knowledge as a pure fact, i.e. as an object that may or may not be visible, but as the result of an interpretive process, which may be more or less effective depending on who is doing the process. Still, the underlying paradigm remains essentially the same as in *Andreas* and in the other Old English poems examined so far: the text does not represent several different possible points of view on the situation, each peculiar to the specific mindset of a character, but a single truth, which exists independently of any point of view and which may or may not be fully accessible. It is undeniable that *Genesis B* shows a slight move away from that paradigm in that the cognitive abilities of the character are taken into account, but that departure is minimal – the text shows different *degrees* of perception but not different *kinds* of outlook.

As a consequence, it seems difficult, based on the clues present in the text itself, to see fully functional dramatic irony in the poem. Still, the interpretation of the text remains difficult. In *Andreas*, the temporary concealment of the truth has a clear didactic function – having been tried and tested, the saint is strengthened in his faith and ready to fulfil his mission. In *Genesis B*, the function of the character's ignorance is not so obvious. No textual evidence supports the hypothesis of wilful and sinful blindness, but no other interpretation is clearly suggested either. One might read into the poem a warning against demonic attacks, which have the power to lead astray even the best intentioned, but no way to guard against such danger is suggested. In that, the text is very different from *Juliana*, which offers very explicit guidance: the account of the demon and its tactics (382–97a) shows that if a believer prays and uses spiritual weapons,⁶⁵ they may drive away their foe.

One may even wonder whether, in spite of its central theme, the poem is truly conveying a Christian message. After all, Eve is only shown as having an understanding too weak to resist the snares of the demon, and this is not characterised as a fault or a sin by the poem: even after the Fall, Eve is still described positively (821–3). As such, it seems as if the moral of the narrative is that, when the opponent is stronger, defeat and suffering are inevitable, no matter how good one's intentions. If the poem was complete rather than embedded into *Genesis A*, it might be easier to decipher the lesson of the tale. As it is, one cannot rule out the possibility that the text is simply imperfect or perhaps more concerned with poignant drama than with moral lessons.

⁶⁵ See Eph., X.19.

It seems entirely possible that the poet has deliberately emphasised the contrast between Eve's innocence and the horror of her act (in keeping with Old English and Old Saxon aesthetics), without trying to use that contrast to convey any particular lesson. In any case, no textual clue suggests that irony is intended.

Another type of 'dramatic irony' that needs consideration is the one that, for want of a better word, I have called 'Germanic' and that is mostly to be found in *Beowulf*. That category encompasses most of the pessimistic elements of the poem: all those that seem to suggest that the hopes of the characters will be disappointed, that they themselves are not up to the ideals they defend and that bliss or safety can only ever be transitory. Such elements have been considered a form of dramatic irony by several critics. Liggins's article on the subject is quite representative of that approach:

The poet rings numerous changes on his pattern of contrasts ... He contrasts characters, both in the main story and in the episodes, he contrasts past with present, or present with future time. Above all, he is concerned with the difference between a man's thoughts, wishes or hopes and the way in which events actually turn out. The contrasts contribute towards the overall structure of the poem. I suggest that they also express a significant part of the poet's philosophy.⁶⁶

Many elements in the poem contribute to this contrastive effect, but not all of them are alike and one should not be too hasty in grouping them under the label of dramatic irony. It is undeniable that the mode of representation favoured by the poem relies heavily on implicitness. The poet frequently alludes to threats looming in the future of the characters, for instance when the future destruction of Heorot is mentioned (82b–83a). Litotes and euphemisms are also quite common, as when Grendel is said not to desire peace in order to express the monster's destructive intent (*sibbe ne wolde*, 154b). In themselves, such devices cannot be considered ironic, unless irony is conceived of in a sense so broad as to be meaningless.

These devices do deserve a closer look, however, when it seems that the character is gauging the future less astutely than the narrator. The most frequently mentioned instances are Wealhtheow's speech when she alludes to her children's fate; Hrothgar's decision to marry his daughter to Finn in the hope of ending the conflict with the Heathobards; and Beowulf's satisfaction when he reflects on his

⁶⁶ Liggins, 'Irony and Understatement in *Beowulf*', p. 5. The contrast between the undeniably impressive feats achieved by Beowulf and the pessimistic elements in the text have also been commented on in detail by Lawrence, *Beowulf and Epic Tradition*, especially p. 27; Bonjour, *The Digressions in Beowulf*; Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, in particular pp. 132–41; Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*'; and Shippey, *Old English Verse*, pp. 32–43.

victory against the dragon before his death. The first example is very problematic, as the interpretation of the passage depends in great part on what is known (or supposed to be known) about Hrothulf from other texts and such information is very uncertain.⁶⁷ The second example is also problematic because even though it seems reasonable to assume that Hrothgar is convinced that the marriage is a good idea, the character never actually expresses that view explicitly, so any irony can only be very indirect. The best candidate for dramatic irony is thus Beowulf's last but one speech:

Ic ðara frætwa frean ealles ðanc,
wuldurcyninge, wordum secge,
ecum dryhtne, þe ic her on starie,
þæs ðe ic moste minum leodum
ær swyltdæge swylc gestrynan.
Nu ic on maðma hord mine bebohte
frode feorhlege, fremmað gena
leoda þearfe; ne mæg ic her leng wesan.
Hatað heaðomære hlæw gewyrcean
beorhtne æfter bæle æt brimes nosan;
se scel to gemyndum minum leodum
heah hlifian on Hronesnæsse,
þæt hit sæliðend syððan hatan
Biowulfes biorh, ða ðe brentingas
ofer floda gemyndu feorran drifað. (*Beowulf*, 2794–808)⁶⁸

In this passage, Beowulf expresses his gratitude for having been able to obtain great riches for his people before his death. Shortly before (2732b–2740), he had also expressed his satisfaction for having been able to protect his people for fifty years. The end of the poem, however, shows that the Geats will bury the treasure without using it and that they expect to suffer greatly from attacks by neighbouring nations, against whom they will be defenceless.

This apparent contradiction is made all the harder to analyse by the fact that the motivations of the Geats for burying the treasure are not made explicit in the poem. For Ridsden, the aim of that discrepancy is to point out the vanity of human ambitions:

⁶⁷ See Chapter 2, n. 61.

⁶⁸ 'With these words I say thanks to the ruler of everything, the king of glory, the eternal lord, for those treasures that I see here and for the fact that I was allowed to obtain such things for my people before my dying day. Now that I have paid the price of my old life for this hoard of precious goods, attend to the needs of the people – I can no longer be here. Command men famous in battle to build a splendid mound after the burning, on the headland by the ocean; it will stand tall on Hronesnæs as a reminder to my people, so that afterwards sailors will call it Beowulf's barrow, they who lead their ships from far away on the darkness of the waves.'

[A]fter he has died to save them from further attacks by the dragon and to win the beast's hoarded treasure (which they discard), the Geats are aware that without the hero who has just died to save them, they are likely to be destroyed soon by foreign invaders anyway. ... I would guess that the first time you read that passage you laughed if grimly at our curious human failings and in mutual understanding that we often sacrifice ourselves for nothing⁶⁹

Liuzza's analysis is a little more detailed, but it seems to follow the same line of reasoning:

The poem has shown at great length the effect of treasure distributed, treasure hoarded, treasure passed on ... and [we] must conclude that treasure is no help in sustaining an earthly kingdom or, presumably, procuring one's place in a heavenly one. It does not even, contrary to the assertion in the poem's prologue, guarantee one's safety and support when war comes. As *Beowulf* takes comfort in the treasure for which he has given his life, we cannot but judge his perspective tragically limited – good on his terms, perhaps, but woefully inadequate on ours. When he offers thanks to God for this treasure (2794–99), the irony of his words is inescapable; his values and ours cannot be reconciled.⁷⁰

Such interpretations raise the question of whose values should be taken into account when reading the text. Certainly, a modern audience can read irony into the text if they assess the character's behaviour against modern values, but that does not prove that the text itself is ironic. If the text is to be conclusively shown as ironic, then a discrepancy must be found not between our values and the character's but between the character's values and those promoted elsewhere in the text. In fact, such a discrepancy is not so easy to locate.

First, Liuzza suggests that the poem does not give a very positive image of treasure. This assessment is only partially correct. Some riches (those given by *Beowulf* to his companions and the dragon's gold) do not seem beneficial, but others fulfil their role effectively: Hrothgar and Wealhtheow are generous with *Beowulf* who, in turn, achieves great deeds for them and for the safety of their people; *Beowulf* then gives some of those riches to Hygelac, who grants him lands and thus ensures that *Beowulf* will remain faithfully by his side. Not all the exchanges of treasure in the poem are in vain.⁷¹

Second, and most importantly, the ironic interpretation of the passage seems to overestimate the optimism expressed by the character. *Beowulf* never says that he is satisfied that he has ensured a happy

⁶⁹ Risden, 'Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 145.

⁷⁰ Liuzza, 'Iron and Irony in *Beowulf*', p. 67.

⁷¹ For an important contribution on the role of treasure in *Beowulf*, see Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf*, in particular chapters 2 ('Loot and the Economy of Honour', pp. 35–76) and 3 ('Unferth's Gift', pp. 77–102).

future for his people or that he thinks the Geats will use the treasure well and profitably. Generally speaking, whenever the character talks about the future, he is either very cautious or downright pessimistic. Not only does he contemplate the likelihood of the failure of Finn and Freawaru's marriage (2020–69a), but he also envisages the possibility of his own failure before he confronts Grendel and his mother (442–55, 632–8 and 1474–91). The satisfaction expressed by Beowulf here only concerns past events and it is undeniable that they were successful: he did protect his people for fifty years and he did acquire a great treasure. What happens next is no longer his responsibility, hence his command to Wiglaf: *fremmað gena / leoda þearfe; ne mæg ic her leng wesian* ('attend to the needs of the people – I can no longer be here').

It may seem natural to us to think that a leader should worry about the future of their people after their own death, but it is not obvious that such is the conception of leadership promoted by the poem. In fact the worldview conveyed by the text seems to include only very measured expectations. On several occasions, there are hints that people have only limited control on their environment. This is precisely the message conveyed by the famous maxim *Wyrð oft nereð / unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deah* ('fate often spares the undoomed man, if his courage is good enough', 572b–573) – a warrior must be brave, but that is not the only factor at play. What he may or may not accomplish will always also depend on things outside of his control. The same goes for any member of society. Thus, *Maxims I* teaches us that a king and a queen must be generous (81–83a), which Hrothgar and Wealhtheow undoubtedly are, and yet they are not protected from trouble; similarly, a wife must be faithful and constant (*Maxims I*, 100–1a), which Hildeburh and Freawaru apparently are, and yet, once again, it is not enough to keep them and their loved ones safe.

Unlike Ridsen, I do not think that such facts should lead us to read into the poem a form of cynicism or pessimistic relativism – in spite of the conviction that irreproachable behaviour is not always enough to guarantee safety and prosperity, the poem still strongly advocates honourable behaviour, particularly through the use of proverbial and pseudo-proverbial statements. To better understand that particular worldview, a short detour through Norse poetry might be helpful. The gnomic poem *Hávamál* specifies the circumstances in which it is appropriate to feel satisfaction:

At qveldi scal dag leyfa, kono, er brend er,
mæki, er reyndr er, mey, er gefin er,
ís, er yfir kœmr, ql, er druccit er. (*Hávamál*, § 81)⁷²

⁷² 'The day must be praised in the evening, a woman when she has been burnt [on her funeral pyre], a sword when it has been tried, a girl when she has been married, ice when it has been crossed, mead when it has been drunk.'

The meaning of the proverb is twofold. On the one hand, it states with force the uncertainty of the future and discourages any form of optimism. On the other hand, it does invite people to praise what can be justly praised: the things that have come to an end. One may very well praise a girl's life on her wedding day, without committing to any kind of prediction regarding her married life. Beowulf's attitude on his dying day seems to reflect the same ethos. His life being over, he can legitimately express satisfaction about his past achievements. As for the future, it will be up to other heroes and other kings to prove wise and brave, and it will be up to fate to determine the result of their endeavours: *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel* ('fate always proceeds as it must', 455b).

If the poem does share a similar worldview to that expressed in *Hávamál*, then Beowulf's speech seems to be the epitome of wisdom and not that of a man blinded by wishful thinking. The possibility remains, however, that the worldview of the poem is Christian rather than pagan, and thus somewhat different from that expressed in *Hávamál*. Liuzza implicitly alludes to that Christian dimension when he mentions the uselessness of earthly riches to gain salvation. It would be conceivable for Beowulf's speech to be beyond reproach from a Germanic standpoint and yet to be implicitly criticised by the Christian narrator.⁷³ However, it remains to be proved that the character and the narrator have different views in matters of ethics and religion.⁷⁴ Certainly the poet was Christian whereas the characters are supposedly pagan (this fact is specified explicitly in lines 175–83a), but the words of the characters and those of the narrator do not differ very much from each other, either in terms of diction or outlook.

For Robinson, the difference is slight, but perceptible. For him, characters frequently use epithets traditionally attached to the Christian God (for instance *waldend*, 'ruler'; or *miltig god*, 'mighty God'), but never specifically Christian concepts, unlike the narrator who is occasionally more specific.⁷⁵ He does acknowledge, however, that in most cases the phrases used by the narrator are precisely the same generic terms as those used by the characters.⁷⁶ For him, that stylistic homogeneity masks a very real difference: the seemingly Christian vocabulary used by the characters is a very superficial layer, a transparent illusion, and the phrases should not be understood in the same way depending on whether a pagan or a Christian character is speaking.

⁷³ Leyerle famously defended that thesis in 'Beowulf the Hero and the King' but others have presented similar arguments, for instance Goldsmith in *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*.

⁷⁴ On this tricky issue, see also Chapter 5, n. 19.

⁷⁵ Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style*, pp. 37–46

⁷⁶ Actually, one may add that the same goes for other Old English poems: Jesus, in particular, is only infrequently referred to specifically as 'Jesus' or 'Christ' and much more often as 'lord' or 'ruler'.

There is not much actual evidence to support that interpretation, however.⁷⁷ It seems to rest primarily on the conviction that the poet must have wanted to avoid anachronism and to represent characters with specific, appropriate points of view, but we have seen that evidence of such a desire is itself lacking in the Old English poetic corpus.

All in all, it is impossible to rule out completely the possibility that there may have been some implicit Christian disapproval of Beowulf on the part of the poet, precisely because what is implicit can only be elusive, but there certainly seems to be very little evidence for it. In fact, the indirect clues that are available actually seem to point in another direction: the poet never explicitly expresses disapproval of Beowulf; the clues never suggest that anyone else could have done better in the same situation; Beowulf's behaviour never seems to contradict the lessons provided by proverbial or pseudo-proverbial statements in the poem and no stylistic marker is used to create a manifest difference between the words of the character and those of the narrator.⁷⁸

The same holds true for Hrothgar and the other positive characters in the poem. It is true that the poet often hints at how transient their joy will prove and at how threatening their future looks, but never is there a tangible hint that the characters are limited in their understanding or lucidity. It is not so much the point of view of the characters that is shown as limited but their capacity for action in an often hostile world. This fact apparently does not lead the poet to express disdain or distance. On the contrary, a vibrant homage is given to those few heroes who, for a few decades, actually managed to hold the danger at bay and guarantee peace and prosperity. To a modern reader used to relative political stability, it may seem that such an achievement is not good enough, but to an Anglo-Saxon poet it might have seemed quite impressive in its own right – and, to an Anglo-Saxon poet imagining a kingdom beset by monsters in the distant past, it must have seemed especially so.

As such, it does not seem that the aesthetic of the poem is dominated by dramatic irony. However, it is undeniable that contrast plays

⁷⁷ This aspect of Robinson's thesis has in fact been strongly criticised by some, in particular by Irving who writes: 'Thus, the poet is seen as constantly wigwagging secret messages to his Christian audience over his characters' heads. Robinson here resorts to a desperate expedient, since such punning is no feature of the oral-derived style ... Finally, and perhaps most important, the tone he attributes to the poem seems entirely inappropriate: the poet is shown as constantly pointing to, or perhaps gloating over, the pitifully or pathetic condition of the benighted characters. This is in no way the *Beowulf* most of us think we know' ('Christian and Pagan Elements', p. 188). See also Crépin, *Beowulf: Édition diplomatique et texte critique*, vol. 2, p. 574.

⁷⁸ One should also add the fact that the Christian take on risking one's life in combat for treasure in Anglo-Saxon aristocratic culture presumably differed significantly from the views expressed in the New Testament or in Christian teachings today. On this issue, see Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf*.

a major role: in fact, it seems that the lights of the drinking hall look all the brighter precisely because darkness is threatening from all sides. Generally speaking, none of the poems examined in this chapter seem to display dramatic irony. It seems that a number of episodes do rely on strong contrasts or on sharp situation reversals, but there is no conclusive evidence that at least two different points of view on the same object are represented, of which one is rejected by the authority behind the poem.

Conclusion

The distance separating us from Old English poetry and the culture that saw its development is such that there will always be some uncertainty as to how the poems should be interpreted. In particular, there will always be some doubt wherever implicit meanings are concerned, including ironic ones. With that caveat in mind, it remains true that the textual clues that are available to us do seem to converge in suggesting that Old English poetry does not use devices relying on a discrepancy between several different points of view.

This does not necessarily mean that the phenomena identified as ironic by some are without interest, however. The analyses above confirm the centrality of contrast to Old English aesthetics. They also show a subtle and deliberate use of phrases in seemingly inappropriate contexts to spark reflection, and of patterns of change and reversal to enhance drama. Such devices deserve the attention they have received because they play a significant role in Old English poetic texts, but calling them ironic is neither desirable nor helpful.

This is not a simple matter of terminology. To call such devices ironic is to invite comparison with what we see as ironic in modern and contemporary textual productions. This may give us the illusion of a greater proximity to Anglo-Saxon culture, but I believe that such is an illusion. The contrastive devices encountered in Old English poetry may look somewhat like ironic patterns on the surface, but they do not work in quite the same way, and to call them by the same name is misleading. To say that Old English poetry does not use irony is not to say that it lacks complexity. Old English poems do rely on sophisticated rhetorical devices and those devices are all the more exciting to study precisely because they are not always the same as those encountered in cultural productions closer to us.

Conclusion

What needs to be proved is that Old English literature has a value different in kind from other types. And here the fact that the verse tradition is a dead one can, paradoxically, be an advantage. For in a way Old English poetry presents a challenge to any theory of literature based on our modern tradition from Spenser onwards.¹

As noted by Zumthor,² there is something paradoxical about the medieval world in that, even though our own world can be said to originate from it, so much has happened and so much has changed since the early Middle Ages that it can seem as if we no longer have any connection at all to that distant era. An important consequence of that fact is that any analysis of an early medieval text is fraught with risk. None of the concepts we use can be assumed to have eternal or universal relevance,³ so they must all be evaluated carefully before they can be applied to such texts.⁴ This can be seen as an obstacle, but it is also possible to take a more positive view of the issue and, like Shippey (as quoted at the beginning of this chapter), to see it as an advantage and an opportunity.

Direct Speech was long regarded in literary criticism as the simplest form of Represented Speech, requiring little explanation or analysis, unlike its supposedly more sophisticated counterpart, Free Indirect Speech. In the past decades, linguists have shown that there was no reason to regard any form of Represented Speech as more natural or simple than the others. Interestingly, but perhaps not entirely surprisingly, this renewed view of Represented Speech has come for the most part from two directions: medievalists and specialists of the spoken word, i.e. from scholars with a keen interest in orality.

To give a 'voice' to the words of another is no easy feat and it can never be the same as having another person actually speak in their own words and their own voice. The ease with which modern readers accept the idea that an author can create a distinct narrator-persona and any number of fully fledged characters, each with their own

¹ Shippey, *Old English Verse* (1972), p. 10.

² Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, pp. 31–2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 36: 'Il n'y a pas (sinon à un degré de généralité qui les rend peu utilisables) de catégories éternelles auxquelles dogmatiquement renvoyer.' In the translation published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1992, Philip Bennett translates this sentence as 'Eternal categories that can be referred to dogmatically do not exist, except at a level of generalization that makes them useless' (p. 6).

⁴ For Cerquiglini, modern concepts cannot be 'applied' to medieval texts, they can only be 'ventured' or 'attempted' (*La parole médiévale*, p. 10).

idiosyncratic personality, manner of speaking and point of view, is the product of convention and long habit – there is nothing natural or evident about it.

In a truly oral tradition, the performer fully identifies with the narrator and never entirely disappears behind the characters when they speak.⁵ Additionally, in such a tradition, the poet seems to act as a link in a chain of transmission rather than as an author in the strongest sense. As for characters, they are not textual beings created from scratch by an all-powerful demiurge, but rather the reputation of a person, the fame they retain in collective memory. Whether that person ever truly existed or not is beside the point: no character of Old English poetry is presented by the poet as a fictional character born of their own imagination. Within such a model, narrative illusion cannot fully operate and the audience remain aware of the fact that, when a character is 'speaking', it is just the performer speaking in a different way, not an actual new speaker.

Extant Old English poems no longer quite follow that paradigm, but they are closer to it than to the modern, fully literate paradigm. As a consequence, any apparent sign of irony or implicit characterisation must be treated with the utmost care, if not outright suspicion, as such devices do not fit the model very well. If we think of Direct Speech as the representation of another person's words, then the rigidity and formality of Direct Speech in Old English poetry can only disappoint. If, however, we see it as an actualised mode of narrative, i.e. as a way of telling a story more strikingly, then it appears as the wonderfully versatile and effective device it truly is.

A Model for Direct Speech in Old English Poetry

A full understanding of Direct Speech requires a full understanding of the complex situation of enunciation behind its production, and particularly of the interplay between narrator and character. Clearly, the narrators of Old English narrative poetry are not narrators in the narrow, prototypical sense defined by Margolin: 'the single, unified, stable, distinct human-like voice who produces the whole narrative discourse we are reading'.⁶ The narrator is a problematic figure in Old English poetry, not only because of its lack of a unified voice but also because of its lack of a clearly distinct point of view.

⁵ In that case, there can be no narrator distinct from the performer: all the first-person markers necessarily refer to the actual speaker. However, it seems useful to retain the concept of a narrator as a theoretical role or function (even if in some cases two functions can be played by the same entity) instead of claiming that some texts have no narrator at all (a claim made for instance by Banfield in *Unspeakable Sentences*).

⁶ Margolin, 'Narrator', p. 354.

Conclusion

Apart from Cynewulf's epilogues, which are actually more akin to authorial paratext (cf. prefaces, acknowledgements and such like in modern publications) than to narratorial comments,⁷ there are very few elements in Old English poetry that give any indication regarding the 'psychological disposition' of the narrator.⁸ The only possible exception is the passage from *Andreas* discussed earlier (1479–89) (see Chapter 5, 'The Narrator's Voice') and it does not reveal much: the narrator appears as a stereotypical humble and hardworking figure and that is it. Most importantly, that short passage finds no echo in the rest of the poem. As such, the self-presentation is merely a momentary posture; it does not contribute to establishing a stable and unified persona. The same goes for Cynewulf's epilogues, which find no echo in the poems themselves.

The level of information to which the narrator has access is also problematic. In the absolute, it seems as if the narrator has access to any possible information, including detailed knowledge of the characters' motivations. However, in an article about *Beowulf*,⁹ Greenfield rightly points out that the narrator is not quite omniscient: there are passages where the narrator alludes to knowledge unknown to human beings and therefore unknown to the narrator as well, seeing as the narrative is ostensibly based on knowledge passed on orally. Religious poems are not quite like *Beowulf* in that the poets can rely on divine revelation and on written texts to supplement their knowledge. As a consequence, there is less room for unknowable mysteries in them. That said, the narrators of religious poems all acknowledge their reliance on sources: they never claim that they know everything there is to know *a priori*.

If omniscience is considered not in absolute terms (how much the narrator knows), but in relative ones (how better-informed the narrator is), then Old English narrators again appear to be lacking. Admittedly, the narrator often reveals knowledge that could not realistically be known to the characters and sometimes knowledge that is explicitly described as unknown to them (as when *Andreas* is unaware of the true identity of the pilot). However, there are also a significant number of instances where a character is also privy to information they could not realistically know. This is obviously the case in the passage analysed above, where Eve speaks as if she knew what had been said in her absence (*Genesis B*, 551b–556a), but there are other, perhaps less

⁷ This is especially true for *Elene*, where the epilogue appears after the word *Finit*.

⁸ See Chapter 6, 'Modern Views on Point of View', p. 199.

⁹ Greenfield, 'The Authenticating Voice in *Beowulf*.' Fulk, Bjork and Niles (*Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th edn) accept that view, characterising the knowledge of the narrator as 'sweeping though not unlimited' and adding: 'In general, while serving as our chief guide to the work, the narrator's authenticating voice still falls short of final authority' (p. xcix).

clear-cut cases, that are also worth noting, especially in *Beowulf*, where characters sometimes provide surprising insights into the future. When Beowulf claims that Grendel will want to eat the Geats if he wins (442–5a) or when Wealhtheow says that Hrothulf will prove generous with her sons if he remembers what he owes her and Hrothgar (1184–7), there is no reason to think that the characters know more than they should: as suggested by the use of conditional clauses, they are merely making hypotheses. Yet when Beowulf alludes to the tragedy threatening the alliance between the Danes and the Heathobards (2032–66), and perhaps also when the messenger describes the probable end of the truce between the Geats and the Swedes (2999–3007a), it seems that the information provided goes beyond what the character could realistically know, especially considering the level of detail. It is as if the ‘omniscience’ of the narrator was to some extent shared with the characters, or at least with some of them. If the points of view of the characters were very sharply defined and limited, such a hypothesis would be absurd, but given the number of anomalies observed, it is not necessarily to be discarded.

Additionally, Old English poems do not promote the idea of a radical asymmetry between the narrator and the audience in terms of access to information. Plural narrative formulas such as *us gewritu secgað* or *we gefrunan* suggest that the audience already share the information conveyed in the text and thus stand on equal footing with the narrator. For the modern readers of the text, such equal footing is of course pure fiction, but for the intended audience, it might have been true or close enough. As such, even if the narrator is regarded as ‘omniscient’ or almost omniscient, one cannot say that the narrator is distinguished by their omniscience. It might be more accurate to say that the facts are ‘all-visible’ than to say that the narrator is all-knowing: after all, what is known appears clearly, but the persona holding that knowledge is more elusive.

The ideological orientation of the narrator is equally problematic. On the one hand, the texts are very strongly oriented, with abundant and contrasted axiological vocabulary and many comments providing judgement on the actions represented.¹⁰ On the other hand, that orientation is for the most part shared with the protagonists and, presumably, with the intended audience. As noted by Clemoes concerning *Beowulf*, the narrator ‘remains the voice of traditional corporate wisdom, indistinguishable from the kind the protagonists utter themselves’.¹¹

As a consequence, Old English poetic narrators cut a somewhat paradoxical – or at least complex – figure. On the one hand, they have

¹⁰ See Greenfield (‘The Authenticating Voice in *Beowulf*’) for whom such comments are part of the narrator’s authenticating role.

¹¹ Clemoes, ‘Action in *Beowulf* and Our Perception of It’, p. 150.

Conclusion

maximum control over the text's meaning (everything is explained, commented on and judged), but on the other hand there is not any distinct, coherent figure to which such actions could be attributed.¹² It is as if the narrator was immanent to the text – present everywhere and yet nowhere to be seen.

A corollary to that omnipresence is the lack of autonomy for characters, which, in turn, can only look incomplete to a modern audience. Deprived of a singular, stable voice or point of view, the character seems to have no substance of its own. As suggested by the epithets used to describe them, characters find their identity in their function and in relation to other characters. Their interest lies not in their representation of a credible person, but as vectors of an action and a discourse that go beyond them, as the embodiment of an archetype that has meaning within a certain ideological framework.

This relative lack of interest for the character as such implies that a reversal is necessary in the way that Direct Speech is traditionally understood. Many scholars see Direct Speech as a device that can and / or should help characterisation. In other words, the speeches are not just interesting for what they say but also, and most importantly, for what they say about the character. I would argue that it is actually the other way round, that the speech is more important than the character as such.

A detour through Ducrot's theory of enunciation provides useful insight into the issue. To explain how a 'speaking subject' ('sujet parlant', i.e. the actual real-life person who is speaking) may use several 'utterers' ('énonciateurs') in their discourse, whose points of view may or may not coincide with the point of view of the 'speaker' ('locuteur', i.e. the implied author of the utterance rather than the actual person), Ducrot uses comparisons with drama and the novel. First, he compares utterers to characters in a play, which may express various points of view but are not ultimately responsible for the words they speak (the playwright is). Later, he compares the speaking subject to the author of a novel and the speaker to its narrator.¹³

Ducrot's aim is not to comment on narratological issues but to use known narratological concepts to better explain how a person can use several points of view to construct a complex discourse. I would like to do the reverse and use Ducrot's insights concerning utterers and speakers to better understand how Old English poetic narratives work. It is clear that the whole point of using several utterers with whom the speaker identifies more or less closely (or not at all) is not

¹² Similarly, there is no consistent implied author either (on this topic, see Huisman, 'Subjectivity / Orality', p. 320, who notes the lack of an 'effaced but nonetheless consistently positioned "individual author"' in Old English poems).

¹³ Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit*, pp. 205–8.

to reveal anything in particular about the said utterers, but to express something in a manner that is particularly effective, diplomatic or entertaining. Irony, for instance, requires the use of a distinct utterer to express a view considered absurd by the speaker. The aim is not to comment on the utterer (which, in most cases, has no definite identity or substance), but to express an idea indirectly and wittily. In such a scenario, the utterer has very little autonomy and is merely an extension or projection of the speaker rather than a truly separate entity.

Characters in a narrative necessarily have more substance than such 'utterers' because they come with a name and a part to play in a series of events. However, they need not embody a radically different paradigm. In fact, it is possible to imagine a broad spectrum of possibilities, ranging from allegorical texts (where characters have little existence beyond their role as spokespersons) to Dostoevsky's novels (where characters give the illusion of being completely autonomous from the narrator). The evidence suggests that Old English poems, while not quite at the end of the spectrum themselves, are closer to allegory than to the realist novel in the way they handle narrator and characters.

In other words, in Old English narrative poetry, it seems that the narrator and the character are not anthropomorphic entities – fictional creations mirroring actual real-life people – but two essential mechanisms in the narrative, both contributing together to its successful expression. The story – i.e. not just the chronicle of a series of events but the meaningful weaving of those events together – matters more than the characters living it or the narrator telling it.

The stylistic devices characteristic of Direct Speech in Old English poetry show how keen poets are to infuse meaning into their narratives. Old English traditional diction, with its constant drive towards abstraction and polarisation, cannot be dissociated from that impetus. This is no dogmatic propaganda, however. Certainly, no room is given to any alternative discourse, but the discourse promoted is itself complex and open to interpretation, requiring the active participation of the audience to create meaning.

I think that Direct Speech in Old English poetry should be seen in that context, as a device to give additional meaning to the narrative, rather than as a way to represent speeches as such. In other words, Direct Speech is not used to represent conversations, to show what a character would say in a given situation 'if they were real people', and it is not used to give voice to contrasted points of view either. Direct Speech is not narrative's Other – it is an integral part of it and cannot be dissociated from it.

The main functions of Direct Speech in Old English narrative poems are as follows. First, it allows the poet to create salient points in the narrative: the overall structure is still that of a string of episodes without much hierarchy, but clearly some episodes are more salient than others,

which avoids monotony. The care with which speeches are introduced suggests they are intended to be salient points. Additionally, their size contributes to the dilation of comparatively short scenes in narrative time, but which are considered crucial to the story. It is particularly obvious in *Beowulf*, where numerous speeches allow the scenes of community to take centre stage, especially in Heorot, but also, to a lesser extent, back in the Geats's homeland. Such harmonious social interactions are precisely the ideal that Beowulf strives to protect throughout the story and are therefore crucial to the narrative as a whole.¹⁴ In poems translated from the Latin, such structural effects are less striking, as the sources simply have too many short speeches. However, Old English poets tend to restructure Latin dialogues into a smaller number of longer speeches, thus taking the structure of their narrative closer to that observed in original poems.

Second, Direct Speech allows the story to be actualised. In much the same way a present-tense narration would, Direct Speech allows the poet to bridge the distance between the time of the story and the time of narration through the use of proximal deixis. The use of the present tense contributes to that effect, of course, but the most important marker in this respect is undoubtedly *nu*. Its (often multiple) presence 'overmarks' the identification of the speech time to the performance time, marking certain passages as particularly salient, by comparison with the narrative, but also, quite often, by comparison with the rest of a longer speech.

Another deictic marker worth commenting on is the first-person pronoun *I*. While Old English poetic characters have relatively little substance, they do enjoy a privileged status by comparison with the narrator: they have a name and a place in the world, which makes the fact that they have a 'voice' more natural;¹⁵ they are also witnesses to the action, which gives them authority;¹⁶ finally, the characters that are allowed to speak are usually quite prestigious, which further reinforces their authority.

Direct Speech also allows the poet to abolish the distance between the story and its audience in another way. Heroic action, whether

¹⁴ For the importance of the notion of community in Old English poetry, see Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*.

¹⁵ In a society still used to an oral paradigm, there is nothing obvious about the use of *I* in a written text to designate the person (fictitious or real) responsible for the writing of the message instead of the object conveying the message – i.e. the parchment itself. Thus, early inscriptions very often use first-person markers to refer to the object on which they are engraved rather than to the author of the inscription (see in particular Kendall, 'From Sign to Vision', p. 138; Bredehoft, 'First-Person Inscriptions and Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England').

¹⁶ This is especially true in Anglo-Saxon England, where oral testimony is still valued very highly, even if the period sees a shift towards greater use of written evidence. See Chapter 2, n. 106.

saintly or secular, is made of physical acts and speech acts. However, physical acts cannot easily be shown, only related. Even the most enthusiastic performer will have trouble producing a convincing performance of Jesus breaking down the gates of hell. Speech acts, on the other hand, can be performed powerfully. Such a performance is not the mere reproduction of what the character might have said, but an 'eternal return' to the 'original' speech act, itself usually archetypal and therefore based on a known paradigm.¹⁷ It would be excessive, of course, to consider poetic performances as true rituals (even if some elements of the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, show that narratives can be used in such a way on occasions). However, especially when the words of God or saints are performed, that sacred dimension might be present. In all cases, Direct Speech presents the audience with powerful words, deserving of attention. That power is often demonstrated by the poets, who take care to depict a mirror of their audience inside the story and their reaction to the words they hear.

Third, and probably the use of Direct Speech most specific to the Old English poetic tradition, Direct Speech allows the poet to make the main issues of the story easily interpretable by making the particular situations represented fit universal and recognisable patterns. That objective is achieved in two main ways. In Direct Speech as in narrative, the use of proverbial statements invites the audience to make a connection between the universal truth expressed and the particular situation at hand. In Direct Speech more specifically, the use of pseudo-proverbial statements makes that very same connection. In both cases, the interpretation of the poem is oriented through recourse to received wisdom.

Paradoxically, the passages using the discursive enunciation mode promote the same universalisation of particular situations. Whenever characters face each other in a crucial situation – whether about to confront each other or to strike an alliance – Direct Speech is used to highlight the stakes and make them more readily understandable, through the use of linguistic markers typical of the discursive mode, particularly modals and first and second-person markers. Such markers are not used to individualise the voice of the speaker or to highlight what is particular to the situation at hand. On the contrary, they serve to align the situation with a universal paradigm. Terms of address or clauses of the *gific mot* type are selected because they fit the particular situation, but also because they are abstract and stereotypi-

¹⁷ The phrase was coined by Eliade (*The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*) to express the idea that in earlier societies, past events are related in an archetypal and exemplary form and that this way of dealing with events is congruent with a cyclical understanding of time, where no event is ever truly new, but only an actualisation of an earlier, known archetype.

Conclusion

cal enough to bring the situation within a larger and more intelligible framework.

The didactic function of Direct Speech is also served by other devices. Comments by the character on the ongoing action (but also comments by the narrator in opening and closing formulas) contribute to making the central issues of the narrative more easily understandable, constructing together an interpretation of the narrative whose aim is to reveal the whole truth about the narrative – at least as much of it as the poet is able to perceive and convey. It seems likely that it is that didactic aim – rather than an especially pronounced taste for ceremony – that accounts for the fact that Old English speeches tend to delay the action instead of furthering its progress. That delay gives the audience time to process what they hear or read, a luxury that is all the more welcome when one is not reading at leisure, but depending on the pace set by another who is reading aloud.

A Model in Transition(s)

The ways in which the extant Old English narrative poems handle Direct Speech are similar enough that it seems likely that the model outlined above was already well established when the earliest of them were composed. However, traditions are not fixed entities, and at no point in time are all texts belonging to the same tradition identical in their handling of it. Even though the extant corpus is remarkably homogeneous, it does show signs of the tensions and transitions that the Old English poetic tradition went through.

One such transition was religious and therefore cultural in nature – the conversion of Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity. It is clear that none of the poems examined were composed at the very beginnings of that particular transition: Christian vocabulary is much too standard and much too well integrated into the traditional diction to be considered an innovation contemporary to the extant poems. All the extant narrative poems are deeply Christian and clearly already reliant on a well-established Christian poetic tradition before them.

It is difficult to determine how much influence Christian doctrine, but also and perhaps most importantly Latin textual models, had on the Old English poetic tradition. Generally speaking, it seems likely that Christianity had more impact on the contents than on the shape of Direct Speech. As far as can be glimpsed from comparison with the extant Old Norse and Old Saxon poetic corpora, it seems that the Old English poetic tradition had not moved drastically away from its Germanic ancestor as regards the general shape of Direct Speech. Some foreign devices (e.g. the insertion of textual quotes in *Elene* or of embedded narratives just as detailed as the main one, as in *Elene* and

Andreas) were tolerated; others (e.g. the use of very short speeches and of inconspicuous forms of speech insertion) were rejected, but it seems difficult to discern a deep influence of a Latin model (beyond the unavoidable influence of direct sources on their translations). Cynewulf is one possible exception, in that, more than other poets, he experiments with the size of speeches and their inquit, sometimes producing more flexibility and lightness than is the norm.

Terms of address are an aspect of Direct Speech where it seems likely that Latin Christian culture exerted a significant influence. Some innovations, such as the use of insincere flatteries in Cynewulf's poems, are likely mere toleration of foreign devices rather than true appropriation. Others, however, seem more significant. The abundant use of epithets praising God is apparently an Old English innovation (at least, it seems to have no equivalent in Old Norse or Old Saxon), which could very well have been initially encouraged by difficulties in translating Latin texts into Old English verse. Even more interestingly, it seems that the extant corpus shows an evolution in how characters are conceived. The most archaic poems tend to see the character as an individual connected to a community through blood and social status, whereas more 'modern' poems are more likely to use words denoting moral attributes.

The most important transition, though, is the transition from a purely oral paradigm to a fully literate one. The transition from a model based on memory, sound and community to a model where the text is preserved outside of any human mind and consultable in silence and solitude represents a revolution that cannot be overestimated. That revolution was already well under way and yet far from being over in the Anglo-Saxon period.

The marking of Direct Speech shows that. Obviously, the scribes who copied the four poetic manuscripts – Junius, Exeter, Vercelli and Nowell – could rely on earlier models belonging to a common tradition. They share the same use of large capitals (with varying degrees of ornamentation) to mark the most important divisions in the text, and the use of points and small capitals to mark smaller divisions. However, the model is not rigid and still allows personal initiative and experimentation. The limits of Direct Speech are taken into account by punctuation, but they are handled rather freely. In terms of punctuation and layout, the Nowell Codex is much less elaborate than the Book of Exeter and Junius 11 (particularly the latter), even though they are only separated by a few decades. Even in the most sophisticated manuscripts, however, visual cues merely highlight the true marking of Direct Speech, which is still for the most part based on words and sounds – in other words, it follows an oral paradigm, based on the succession of sounds, more than a literate paradigm based on spatial organisation.

Conclusion

Furthermore, the paradigm for the transmission of knowledge and authority is still largely oral. References to written transmission (particularly through Scripture) do occur in some religious poems, which suggests that changes were under way, but the phenomenon remains marginal. Everywhere, the dominant paradigm is that of live speech, which is typically meant to be performed in public. This preference has important consequences for Old English poetry. Unsurprisingly, it has an impact on the selection of potential speakers and topics. More importantly, it means that the idea of a text conveying several distinct voices is quite foreign to Old English poetics. A text has a single body (the manuscript or the speaker in performance) and therefore a single voice.

As a consequence, the narrator and the characters can only be embryonic figures. The extant poems show narrators fluctuating between the *we* of collective tradition and an *I* whose reference is still elusive. As for the characters, they are archetypal figures significant for the position they occupy in the narrative and for the example they set rather than objects of interest in and of themselves.

That explains the internal marking of Direct Speech favoured by Old English poems. It is not designed to particularise character voices and orchestrate conflicting points of view within a single narrative. On the contrary, it is designed to ensure maximum legibility and intelligibility for an exemplary narrative. This shows a high level of confidence in the power of poetry and, more generally, of speech, to convey truth. Truth is indeed conceived as something complex and potentially difficult to decipher, but also as something that undoubtedly exists and can be revealed and conveyed to others.

It may also partly account for the almost exclusive reliance of Old English poetry on Direct Speech to represent speeches (with narrated speech as another, unobtrusive option). Indirect Speech and other mixed forms are especially interesting because they conflate two voices – a difficult, but potentially very fruitful stratagem when the narrative aims at representing distinct voices and points of view. In the context of Old English poetics, such devices are less useful and none of the poems examined suggests a change had begun in that respect.

Taken all together, the evidence suggests that the transition from an oral paradigm to a literate one had started to affect the material form of Direct Speech in Old English poetry, but that it had yet to make a very significant impact on its aesthetic and ideological aspects.

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ELISE LOUVIOT is a Lecturer at the University of Reims Champagne-Ardenne (France) and a specialist of Old English poetry. Her research interests include orality, tradition, formulas and the linguistic expression of subjectivity.

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